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BY JOHN GALSWORTHY

Villa Rubein

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The Man of Property

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Villa Rubein

By

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G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1908

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TO

B. L. S.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This plain story, which appeared in England in the Spring of 1900, has been rewritten, and is now for the first time published in America.

MANATON, DEVON.
April, 1908.

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Villa Rubein

VILLA RUBEIN

CHAPTER I

THE SPRING

WALKING along the river wall at Botzen, Edmund Dawney said to Alois Harz:

"There 's a family at Villa Rubein, the pink house—would you care to know them?"

Harz answered with a smile:

"Perhaps."

"Come with me then this afternoon?"

They had stopped before an old house with a blind, deserted look, that stood by itself upon the wall; Harz pushed the door.

"Come in," he said, "you don't want breakfast yet. I 'm going to paint the river to-day."

He ran up the bare board stairs, and Dawney followed leisurely; his thumbs hooked

in the armholes of his waistcoat, and his head thrown back.

In the attic which filled the whole top storey, Harz had pulled a canvas to the window. He was a young man of middle height, square-shouldered, active, with an angular face, high cheek-bones, and a strong, sharp chin. His eyes were piercing and steel-blue, his eyebrows very flexible, nose long and thin with a high bridge; and his dark, unparted hair fitted like a cap. He wore the clothes of men who never give to clothes a second thought.

This room, which served him for a studio, a bed-room, and a sitting-room, was bare and dusty. Below the window the river in spring flood rushed down the valley, a stream of molten bronze. Harz dodged before the canvas like a fencer finding his distance; Dawney took his seat upon a packing-case.

"The snows have gone with a rush this year," he drawled. "The Talfer comes down brown, the Eisack comes down blue; they flow into the Etsch and make it muddy green;

a parable of the Spring for you, my painter."

Harz mixed his colours.

"I 've no time for parables," he said, "no time for anything. If I could be guaranteed to live to ninety-nine, like Titian—Ah! he had a chance. Look at that poor fellow who was killed the other day! All that struggle, and then—just at the turn!"

He spoke English with a foreign accent; his voice was rather harsh, but his smile was bright and kindly.

Dawney lit a cigarette.

"You painters," he said, "are better off than most of us. You can strike out your own line. Now if I choose to treat a case out of the ordinary way and the patient dies, I 'm ruined."

"Ah! Doctor—if I don't paint what the public likes, I starve; all the same I 'm going to paint in my own way, and in the end I shall come out on top."

"It pays to work in the groove, my friend, until you 've made your name; after that do what you like, they 'll lick your boots all right."

"Ah, you don't love your work."

Dawney answered slowly: "Never so happy as when my hands are full. But I want to make money, to get known, to have a good time, good cigars, good wine. I hate discomfort. No, my boy, I must work it on the usual lines; I don't like it, but I must lump it. One starts in life with some notion of the ideal—it 's gone by the board with me. I 've got to shove along until I 've made my name, and then, my little man—then——"

"Then! You 'll be soft! You pay for that first period!"

"Take my chance of that; I must; there 's no other way."

"Make one!"

"Humph!"

Harz poised his brush, as though to cast it like a spear:

"A man must do the best there is in him. If he has to suffer—let him suffer!"

Dawney stretched his large soft body; a calculating look had come into his eyes.

"You 're a tough little beggar!" he remarked.

"I 've *had* to be tough."

Dawney rose; tobacco smoke was wreathed around his dark unruffled hair.

"Touching Villa Rubein," he said, "shall I call for you? It 's a mixed household, English mostly—very decent people."

"No, thank you. I 'm going to paint all day. Have n't time to know the sort of people who expect one to change one's clothes."

"As you like; I 'm off." And puffing out his chest, Dawney vanished through a blanket looped across the doorway.

Harz called after him.

"There 's coffee here!"

"No thanks; ta-ta!"

Harz set a pot of coffee on a spirit lamp, and cut himself a slice of bread. Through the window the freshness of the morning came; the scent of sap and blossom and young leaves; the scent of earth, and mountains freed from winter; the new flights and songs of birds; all the odorous, enchanted, restless Spring.

Through the blanket looped across the doorway a white and rough-haired terrier dog, black-marked about the face, with tan and shaggy brows, suddenly appeared. He sniffed at Harz, showed the whites around his eyes, and uttered a peculiar bark. A young voice called :

"Scruff! Thou naughty dog!" Light footsteps on the stairs were heard; from the distance came a thin, high voice:

"Greta! You must n't go up there!"

Through the blanket came slipping in a little girl, of twelve or so, with long fair hair under a wide-brimmed hat.

Her blue eyes opened wide at Harz, her face flushed up with colour. That face was not too regular; its cheek-bones rather prominent, its nose flattish; there was about it an air, innocent, reflecting, quizzical, yet shy.

"Oh!" she said.

Harz smiled: "Good-morning! This your dog?"

She did not answer, but looked at him with soft bewilderment; then running to the dog she seized him by the collar.

"Scr-ruff! Thou naughty dog—the baddest dog!" The ends of her hair fell all about him. "Is n't he bad?" She looked at Harz.

"Not at all! Let me give him bread."

"Oh, no! You must not—I will beat him—and tell him he is bad; then he shall not do such things again. Now he is sulky; he looks so always when he is sulky. Is this your home?"

Harz laughed: "For the present; I am a visitor."

"But I think you are of this country, because you speak like it."

"Certainly, I am a Tyroler."

"I have to talk English this morning, but I do not like it very much—because, also I am half Austrian, and I like it best; but my sister, Christian, is all English. Here is Miss Naylor; she shall be very angry with me."

And pointing to the entrance with a rosy-tipped forefinger, she looked ruefully at Harz.

There came into the room with a walk like the hopping of a bird an elderly, small lady,

in a grey serge dress, with narrow, ordered bands of claret-coloured velveteen; a large gold cross dangled from a steel chain on her chest; nervously she turned her hands, clad in black kid gloves a little white about the seams.

Her hair was prematurely grey; her quick eyes brown; her mouth a trifle twisted at one corner; she held her brown face, kind-looking, but so long and narrow, rather to one side, and wore on it a look of vexed apology. With her quick sentences, that sounded as if she kept them all on strings, and wanted to draw them back the moment she had let them out, she thus began:

"Greta, how *can* you do such things? I don't know what your father would say! I am sure I don't know how to—so extraordinary——"

"Please!" said Harz.

"You must come at once—so very sorry—so awkward!"

They were standing in a ring; Harz with his eyebrows working up and down; the little lady fidgeting her parasol; and Greta, flushed

and pouting, her eyes all dewy, twisting an end of fair hair round her fingers. The dog still sulked upon a bench.

"Oh, look!" cried Greta. The coffee had boiled over. Little brown streams trickled spluttering from the pan; and the dog, with ears laid back and tail tucked in, went scurrying round the room. A feeling of fellowship fell on them at once; and they began to talk.

"Along the wall is our favourite walk, and Scruff—so awkward, so unfortunate—we did not think any one lived here—the shutters are cracked, the paint is peeling off so dreadfully. Have you been long in Botzen? Two months? Fancy! Does n't the rain come in? You are not English? You are Tyrolese? But you speak English so well—there for seven years? Really? So fortunate!—It is Greta's day for English."

The little lady's eyes darted bewildered glances at the roof where the crossing of the beams made so many heavy shadows; at the litter of the brushes, tools, knives, colours on a table made of packing-cases; at the big window, innocent of glass, flush with the

floor, whence dangled a bit of rusty chain—relic of the time when the place had been a store-loft; her eyes were hastily averted from an unfinished figure of the nude upon a canvas.

And all the time her governess was speaking, Greta, with feet crossed, sat on a coloured blanket, dabbling her finger in a little pool of coffee, and gazing up at Harz with a look as if continually she asked herself: "Shall I laugh, or shall I cry? Or shall I go and find out all about it?" And Harz thought: "I should like to paint her just like that. 'Forget-me-not.'"

He took his chalks to make a sketch. The action had an obvious effect upon his visitors.

"Shall you show me?" cried out Greta, scrambling to her feet.

"'Will,' Greta—'will'; how often must I tell you? I think we should be going—it is very late—your father—so very kind of you, but I think we should be going. Scruff!" She gave the floor two taps. The terrier, barking, backed into a plaster cast which came down on his tail, and sent him flying

through the doorway with a yelp. Greta followed swiftly, crying:

"*Ach! du armer Scruffee!*"

Miss Naylor crossed the room; and bowing sidelong, she murmured an apology, and also disappeared.

Harz was left alone, his guests were gone; the little girl with the fair hair and the eyes like two forget-me-nots, the little lady with the kindly gestures and the bird-like walk, the little terrier dog. He looked around him; the room seemed very empty. And gnawing his moustache, he muttered at the fallen cast; drank up his coffee, and threw down his sketch. Then taking up a paint brush, he stood again before his picture, smiling, frowning, smiling. Soon he had forgotten all the little matter in his work.

CHAPTER II

A BREAKFAST PARTY

IT was early morning four days later, and Harz had been out sketching. He was loitering homewards. The shadows of the clouds passed like breaths across the vines and vanished on the jumbled roofs and green-topped spires of the town. A strong sweet wind was blowing from the mountains, there was a stir in the branches of the trees, and flakes of the late blossom drifted by. Amongst the soft green pods of a kind of poplar chafers buzzed, and numbers of their little brown bodies were strewn about the path.

He passed a bench where a girl sat putting up her sketching things. A puff of wind whirled her drawing to the ground; Harz ran to pick it up. She took it from him with a bow; but, as he turned away, she tore the sketch across.

"Ah!" he said; "why did you do that?"

This girl, who stood with a bit of the torn sketch in either hand, was slight and straight; and her face was earnest and serene. She gazed at Harz with large, clear, greenish eyes; her lips and chin defiant, her forehead tranquil.

"I don't like it, that was why."

"Will you let me look at it? I am a painter."

"It is n't worth looking at, but—if you wish——"

He put the two halves of the sketch together, and studied it.

"You see!" she said at last; "I told you so."

Harz did not answer, still looking at the sketch. The girl frowned.

Harz asked her suddenly:

"Why do you paint?"

She coloured, and said:

"Show me what is wrong."

"I cannot show you what is wrong, there is nothing wrong—but why do you paint?"

"I don't understand," she said.

Harz shrugged his shoulders.

"You 've no business to do that," said the girl in a hurt voice; "I want to know."

Harz suddenly became excited.

"Your *heart* is not in it," he said.

She looked at him, startled; then her eyes once more grew thoughtful.

"Yes, I suppose that *is* it. There are so many other things——"

"There should be nothing else," said Harz.

She broke in: "I don't want always to be thinking of myself. Suppose——"

"Ah!" said Harz. "When you begin supposing!"

The girl confronted him, with her head bent down; her hands moved quickly tearing the sketch again.

"You mean that if it does not matter enough, one had better not do it at all. I don't know if you are right—I think you are."

There was the sound of a nervous cough, and Harz saw behind them his three visitors of the other morning. Miss Naylor stepping forward offered him her hand; Greta who was flushed, and had a bunch of wild flowers

in her hand, stared intently in his face. The terrier, who having sniffed decided that he knew this man, now put his muzzle up, and barked.

Miss Naylor broke a somewhat awkward silence.

"We wondered if you would still be here, Christian. I am sorry to interrupt you—I was not aware that you knew Mr.—Herr——"

"Harz, my name is—we were just talking——"

"About my sketch," the girl put in. "Oh! Greta, you do tickle!" for Greta had been whispering in her ear. "Will you come and have breakfast with *us* to-day, Herr Harz? It 's our turn, you know."

Harz, glancing at his dusty clothes, excused himself.

But Greta in a pleading voice said: "Oh! do come! Scruff likes you. It is so dull when there is nobody for breakfast but ourselves."

Miss Naylor's mouth began to twist. Harz hurriedly broke in:

"Thank you, I will come with pleasure; you don't mind my being dirty?"

"Oh no! we do not mind; then we shall none of us wash, and afterwards I shall show you my rabbits."

Miss Naylor, moving from foot to foot, like a bird upon its perch, suddenly exclaimed:

"I hope you won't regret it, not a very good meal—the girls are so impulsive—such informal invitation; we shall be very glad—if you like porridge."

Greta pulled softly at her sister's sleeves, and Christian, gathering her things, led on. The silence of anxiety had fallen on Miss Naylor.

Harz followed in amazement; nothing of this kind had come into his life before. He kept shyly glancing at the girls; and, meeting the speculative innocence of Greta's eyes, he chuckled. After walking a few minutes they came to two great poplar trees, which stood, like sentinels, one on either side of an unweeded gravel walk leading through lilac bushes to a house painted dull pink, with green-shuttered windows, and a roof of green-

ish slate. Over the door in faded crimson letters, "Villa Rubein" was written.

"That is to the stables," said Greta, pointing down a path, where, on a wall, some pigeons sunned themselves. "Uncle Nic keeps his horses there: Countess and Cuckoo—his horses begin with C, because of Chris—they are quite beautiful. He says he could drive them to Kingdom-Come and they would not turn their hair. Bow, and say 'Good-morning' to our house!"

Harz bowed.

"Father said all strangers should, and *I* think it brings good luck." From the doorstep, she looked round at Harz, then ran into the house.

A broad and thick-set man, with stiff, brushed-up hair, a short, brown, bushy beard parted at the chin, a fresh complexion, and blue glasses across his thickish nose, came out, and called in a bluff voice:

"Ha! my good dears, kiss me quick—prrt! How goes it then this morning? A good walk, *hein?*" There was the sound of many loud and rapid kisses.

"Ha, Fräulein, good!" He became aware of Harz's figure standing in the doorway. "*Und der Herr?*" he said.

Miss Naylor hurriedly explained.

"Good! An artist! *Kommen Sie herein*, I am delight. You will breakfast? I too—yes, yes, my dears—I too breakfast with you this morning. I have the hunter's appetite."

Harz looking at him keenly now, perceived him to be of middle height and middle-aged and stout, dressed in a loose holland jacket, a very white, starched shirt, and blue silk sash; that he looked particularly clean, had an air of belonging to Society, and exhaled a really fine aroma of excellent cigars and the best hairdresser's essences.

The room they entered was long and rather bare; there was a huge map on the wall, and below it a pair of globes on crooked legs with toes turned out, resembling two inflated frogs erect upon their hinder limbs. In one corner stood a cottage piano, and close to it a writing-table heaped with books and papers; this nook, sacred to Christian, was somehow foreign to the room, which was

arranged with supernatural neatness. A table was laid for breakfast, and through the long French windows the sun-warmed air came in.

The meal went merrily; Herr Paul von Morawitz was never in such spirits as at table. Words streamed from him. Conversing genially with Harz, he talked of Art in tones that seemed to say: "One does not claim to be a connoisseur—no, *pas si bête*—still, one has a little knowledge, *que diable!*" He recommended him a man in Town who sold cigars that were "not so very bad." He consumed much porridge, ate an omelette; and bending across to Greta gave her a sounding kiss, muttering: "Kiss me quick!" —an expression he had picked up in a London music-hall, long years ago, and considered for some reason *chic*. He asked his daughters' plans, and held out porridge to the terrier, who refused it with a sniff.

"Well," he said, looking at Miss Naylor, "here 's a gentleman who has not even heard our names!"

The little lady began her introductions in a breathless voice.

"Good!" Herr Paul said, puffing out his lips: "Now we know each other!" and, brushing up the ends of his moustaches with his fingers, he carried Harz off into another room. This room had pipe-racks, prints of dancing-girls, spittoons, and easy chairs well-seasoned by cigar smoke; it was also littered with French novels and with newspapers.

The household at this Villa seemed to Harz to be of mixed and curious nature. In fact, cut on both floors by corridors, the Villa was divided into four; each of which divisions had its separate inhabitants, an arrangement which had come about like this:

When old Nicholas Treffry had died, his estate, on the boundary of Cornwall, had been sold and divided up among his three surviving children—Nicholas, who was much the eldest, a partner in the well-known firm of Forsyte & Treffry, teamen, of the Strand; Constance, married to a man called Decie; and Margaret, at her father's death engaged to the curate of the parish, John Devorell, who shortly afterwards became its rector. By

his marriage with Margaret Treffry the rector had one child called Christian. Soon after this he came into some property, and died, leaving it unfettered to his widow. Three years went by, and when the child was six years old, Mrs. Devorell, still young and pretty, came to live in London with her brother Nicholas. It was there that she met Paul von Morawitz—the last of an old Czech family, who had lived for many hundred years on their estates near Budweiss. Paul had been left an orphan at the age of ten, and without a solitary ancestral acre. Instead of acres, he inherited the faith that nothing was too good for a von Morawitz. In later years his *savoir faire* enabled him to laugh at it, but it stayed quietly with him all the same. The absence of acres was of no great consequence, for through his mother, the daughter of a banker at Vienna, he came into a well-nursed fortune. It befitted a von Morawitz that he should go into the Cavalry, but, unshaped for soldiering, he soon left the Service; some said he had a difference with his Colonel upon the quality of food

provided during some manœuvres; others that he had retired because his chargers did not fit his legs, which indeed were rather round.

He had an admirable appetite for pleasure; a man-about-town's life suited him. He went his genial, unreflecting, costly way, in Vienna, Paris, London. He loved exclusively those towns, and boasted that he was as much at home in one as in another. He combined an exuberant vitality with fastidiousness of palate, and devoted both to the acquisition of a special taste in women, weeds, and wines; above all things he was blessed with a wonderful digestion. He was thirty when he met with Mrs. Devorell; and she married him because he was so very different from anybody she had ever seen. People more dissimilar indeed were never mated. To Paul,—accustomed to stage doors,—freshness, a serene tranquillity, and obvious purity were the baits; he had run through more than half his fortune, too, and the fact that she had money possibly attracted him. Be that as it may, he was manifestly fond of

her· his heart was soft, and he developed a domestic side.

Greta was born to them after a year of marriage. The instinct of the "freeman" was, however, not quite dead in Paul; he became a gambler. Retaining his digestion, he lost the other quarter of his fortune without its very much disturbing him. When he began to lose the fortune of his wife things naturally became more difficult. Not too much remained when Nicholas Treffry stepped in, and caused his sister to settle what was left upon her daughters, retaining the income for her life, and appointing it to Paul for his after her death. Paul, losing his supplies, had given up his cards. The instinct of the "freeman" was still however living in his breast; he took to drink. He was never grossly drunk, and rarely very sober. His wife sorrowed over this new passion; and her health, already much enfeebled, soon broke down. The doctors sent her to the Tyrol. She seemed to benefit by this, and settled down at Botzen. The following year, when Greta was just ten, she died. It was

a shock to Paul. He gave up his excessive drinking; became a constant smoker, and lent full rein to domesticity. He was fond of both the girls, but did not understand them in the least; Greta, his own daughter, was naturally his favourite. Villa Rubein remained their home; it was cheap and roomy. Money, since Paul became housekeeper to himself, was scarce.

It was about this time that Mrs. Decie, his wife's sister, whose husband had died out in the East, returned to England; Paul wrote and invited her to come and live with them. She came; she had her own rooms, her own servant; the arrangement suited Paul,—it was economically sound, and there was some one always there to take care of the girls. In truth he began to feel the instinct of the "freeman" rising once again within his heart; it was pleasant to run over to Vienna now and then; to play piquet at a Club in Gries, of which he was the shining light; in a word, to go a little "on the tiles." One could not always mourn—even if a woman were an angel; moreover, his digestion was as good as ever.

The fourth quarter of this Villa was occupied by Nicholas Treffry, whose annual sojourn out of England perpetually surprised himself. Between him and his young niece, Christian, there existed a rare sympathy however; one of those affections between the young and old, which, mysteriously born like everything in life, seems the only end and aim to both, until another feeling speaks within the younger heart.

Since a long and dangerous illness, he had been ordered to avoid the English winter, and at the commencement of each spring he would appear at Botzen, driving his own horses by easy stages from the Italian Riviera, where he spent the coldest months. He would stay till June before going back to London and his Club, and during all that time he let no day pass in which he did not growl at foreigners, their habits, food, drink, raiment, with a kind of big dog's growling that did no harm to any one. The illness had broken him down very much; he was seventy, and looked more; his servant, a Luganese, named Dominique, was devoted to him. Nicholas

Treffry had indeed found him overworked in an hotel, and had engaged him with the caution: "Look—here, Dominique! I swear!" To which Dominique, dark of feature, saturnine, ironical, had replied: "*Très bien, M'sieu!*"

CHAPTER III

MR. NICHOLAS TREFFRY

HARZ and his host sat in their leather chairs; Herr Paul's square back was wedged into a cushion, his round legs crossed. Both were smoking, and they eyed each other furtively, as men of quite different stamp will do when thrown together first. To the young artist his host was something very new, and to be studied eagerly; but in spite of this alertness, perhaps indeed because of it, he seemed both shy and awkward. Herr Paul, on the other hand, very much at ease, was thinking indolently: "Good-looking young fellow this—comes of the people, I expect, not at all the manner of the world; wonder what he talks about."

Presently however Harz got up to look at a photograph that was hanging on the wall. "Ah!" said Herr Paul in German, "that was

a woman! They are not to be found like that these days. She could dance, the little Coralie! Did you ever see such arms? Confess that she is beautiful, *hein?*"

"She has individuality," said Harz. "A fine type!"

Herr Paul, blowing out a cloud of smoke, stared through it at the other.

"Yes," he murmured, "she was fine all over!" He had dropped his eyeglasses, and his full brown eyes, with the little crowsfeet at the corners, wandered from his visitor to his cigar and back again.

And Harz thought: "He'd be like a Satyr if he was n't so clean. Put vine leaves in his hair, paint him asleep, with his hands crossed, so!" He felt inclined to laugh.

"When I am told a person has individuality," Herr Paul was saying in a rich and husky voice, "I generally expect the boots that bulge, an umbrella of improper colour; I expect a creature of 'bad form' as they say in England; who will shave some days and some days will not shave; who sometimes

smells of india-rubber, and sometimes does not smell, which is discouraging!"

Harz said shortly: "You do not approve of individuality?"

"Not if it means doing, and thinking, as those who know better do not do, or think."

"And who are those who know better?"

"Ah! my dear, you are asking me a riddle? Well, then—Society, men of birth, men of recognised position, men above eccentricity, in a word, of reputation."

Harz stood looking at him fixedly. "Men who are flat—who have n't the courage of their own ideas, not even the courage to smell of india-rubber; men who have no desires, and so can spend all their time in making themselves flat!"

Herr Paul drew out a red silk handkerchief and wiped his beard. "I assure you, my dear," he said, "it is easier to be flat; it is more respectable to be flat. *Himmel!* why not then be flat?"

"Like any common fellow?"

"*Certes*; like any common fellow—like me, *par exemple!*" and Herr Paul blandly

waved his hand. When he exercised unusual tact, he made use of a French expression.

Harz flushed. Herr Paul followed up his victory. "Come, come!" he said. "Pass me my men of repute! *que diable!* we are not Socialists. Pass me my—*Hein?* " Growing crimson in the face, he slowly twisted his moustaches: "You laugh?"

"Pardon!" gasped Harz, struggling for gravity; "a thousand pardons! Very rude of me—it 's nothing—just a thought——"

The door was opened, and a rumbling voice remarked: "Morning, Paul. Got a visitor?" Harz saw a tall and bulky figure in the doorway.

"Come in," called out Herr Paul. "Let me present to you a new acquaintance, an artist: Herr Harz—Mr. Nicholas Treffry. Psumm bumm! All this introducing is dry work." And going to the sideboard he poured out three glasses of a light and foaming beer.

Mr. Treffry waved it from him: "Not for me," he said. "Wish I could! They won't let me look at it." And walking to the

window with a heavy tread, which trembled like his voice, he sat down carefully. There was something in his gait and movements a little like the movements of the hind legs of an elephant. He was very tall (it was said, with the exaggeration of a family tradition, that there never had been a male Treffry under six feet in height), but now he stooped, and had grown stout. There was something vast about this unobtrusive personality.

He wore a loose brown velvet jacket, and waistcoat cut to show a soft frilled shirt and narrow ribbon tie; a thin gold chain was looped around his neck and fastened to his fob. His heavy cheeks had folds in them rather like a bloodhound's face. He wore big, drooping, yellow-grey moustaches, which he had a way of sucking in, and a goatee beard hung from his chin. He had long loose ears that might almost have been said to flap. On his head there was a soft black hat, large of brim and low of crown. His grey eyes, heavy-lidded, twinkled under bushy brows with a queer, kind cynicism. As a

young man he had been a sower of wild oats; he had also worked and made much money in his business; he had, in fact, burned the candle at both ends; but he had never been unready to do his fellows a good turn. He had a passion for driving, and his recklessness had caused him to be named in London, where it is difficult to achieve distinction: "The notorious Treffry."

Once—indeed—when he was driving tandem down a hill with a loose rein, the friend beside him said: "For all the good you 're doing with those reins, Treffry, you might as well throw them on the horses' necks."

"Just so," Treffry had answered, doing it. At the bottom of the hill they had gone over a low wall into a potato patch. Treffry had broken several ribs, but his friend had gone unharmed.

He was a great sufferer now, but, constitutionally averse to being pitied, he had a disconcerting way of humming, and this, together with the shaking in his voice, and his frequent use of some peculiar phrase, made the understanding of his speech at

times depend on intuition rather than intelligence.

"I say, Paul," he said, "an awful beast that Swiss of yours—he was playing his pipe beneath my window at five o'clock this morning."

The clock began to strike eleven. Harz muttered an excuse, shook hands with his host, and bowing to his new acquaintance, went away. Looking back he caught a glimpse of Greta's face against the window, and waved his hand to her. In the road he came on Dawney, who was turning in between the poplars, with his thumbs as usual hooked in the armholes of his waistcoat.

"Hallo!" the latter said.

"Doctor!" slyly answered Harz; "the Fates outwitted me, it seems."

"Serves you right," said Dawney, "for your beastly egotism! Stand here till I come out, I shan't be many minutes."

But Harz went on his way. A cart drawn by cream-coloured oxen was passing slowly towards the bridge. In front of the brushwood piled on it two peasant girls were

sitting with their feet upon a mat of grass. He watched it disappear, then walked on fast towards the town.

"I am wasting all my time!" he thought. "In two months I 've done next to nothing. Better to get back to London; that girl will never make a painter!" No, she would never make a painter, but there was something in her that he could not dismiss so rapidly. She was not exactly beautiful, but it was a sympathetic face. The brow was pleasing, with its dark brown hair turned softly back, and the eyes so straight and shining. Those two sisters were very different! That little one was innocent, and yet mysterious; the elder seemed as clear as crystal. A fine study they would make together! . . .

He had entered the town now, and was crossing the Cathedral Square, out of which arcaded streets branched in all directions, exuding their peculiar pungent smell of cows and leather, wood-smoke, wine-casks, drains. The sound of rapid wheels over the stones caused him to turn his head. A carriage drawn by red-roan horses was passing swiftly.

People stared at it, standing still, and looking quite alarmed. It swung from side to side and vanished round a corner. Harz saw Mr. Nicholas Treffry in a long, whitish dust coat, sitting with bent back, touching the horses lightly with his whip; his Italian servant, perched behind, was holding to the seat-rail, with a nervous grin on his dark face.

"Certainly," Harz thought, "there 's no getting away from them this morning—these people, they are everywhere," and he shook his head.

In his studio he began to sort his sketches, wash his brushes, and drag out things he had accumulated during two months' stay. He even began to fold his blanket door. But suddenly he stopped—those two girls! Why not try? What a picture! The two heads, the sky, and leaves! Begin to-morrow! Against that window—no, better at the Villa! Call the picture—Spring! . . .

CHAPTER IV

INCEPTION OF THE PICTURE

THE wind, stirring among the trees and bushes, flung the young leaves skywards. The trembling of their silver linings was like the joyful flutter of a heart at some message of good news. It was one of those Spring mornings when everything seems full of a sweet restlessness—soft clouds chasing fast across the sky; soft scents floating forth and dying; the notes of birds, now shrill and sweet, now hushed in silences—when all nature strives for something, and nothing is at peace.

Villa Rubein withstood the influence of the day; it wore its usual look of restful isolation. Harz sent in his card, and asked to see "*der Herr.*" The servant, a grey-eyed, clever-looking Swiss with no hair on his face, and pleasant smiles, came back and said:

"*Der Herr, mein Herr, ist in dem garten.*" Harz followed him.

Herr Paul, a small white flannel cap upon his head, gloves on his hands, and his glasses on his nose, was watering a rosebush, and humming the serenade from *Faust*.

This aspect of the house was very different from the other. The sun fell on it, and over a veranda creepers clung and scrambled in long scrolls. There was a lawn, whose grass was freshly-mown; flower-beds were laid out, and at the end of an avenue of young acacias was an arbour covered with wistaria.

In the east the mountain peaks—fingers of snow—were glittering above the mist. A grave simplicity lay on that scene, on the roofs and spires, the valleys and the dreamy hillsides, with their yellow scars and purple bloom, and white cascades, like tails of dappled horses swishing in the wind.

Herr Paul held out his hand: "What can we do for you?" he said.

"I have to beg a favour," replied Harz. "I wish to paint your daughters. I will bring the canvas here—they shall have no

trouble. I would paint them in the garden when they have nothing else to do."

Herr Paul looked at him dubiously—he had not forgotten his previous day's discomfiture, and ever since he had been thinking: "Queer bird, that painter—thinks himself the devil of a swell! Looks a determined fellow too!" And now—staring in the painter's face—it seemed to him that on the whole it would be best if some one else refused him the permission asked.

"With all the pleasure, my dear sir," he said. "Come, let us ask these two young ladies!" and putting down his hose, he led the way towards the arbour, thinking: "You'll be disappointed, my young conqueror, or I'm mistaken."

Miss Naylor and the girls were sitting in the shade, reading La Fontaine's fables. Greta, with one eye on her governess, was cutting stealthily a pig in orange peel.

"Ah! my dear dears!" began Herr Paul, who in the presence of Miss Naylor always used his English. "Here is our friend, who has a very flattering request to make; he

would paint you, yes—both together, *al fresco*, in the air, in the sunshine, with the birds, the little birds!"

Greta, gazing at Harz, flushed deep pink, and showed him, furtively, her pig.

Christian said: "Paint us? Oh, no!"

Suddenly she saw Harz looking full at her, and added, slowly: "If you really wish it, I suppose we could!" then dropped her eyes again.

"Ah!" said Herr Paul raising his eyebrows till his glasses fell from his nose: "and what says Gretchen? Does she want to be handed up to posterities a little peacock along with all the other little birds?"

Greta, who had continued staring at the painter, said: "Of-course-I-want-to-be."

"Prrt!" said Herr Paul, looking at Miss Naylor with a frown. The little lady opened her mouth wide, but all that managed to come forth was just a tiny squeak, as sometimes happens when one is anxious to say something, and has not arranged beforehand what to say.

The affair seemed ended; Harz heaved a sigh

of satisfaction. But Herr Paul had still a card to play.

"There is your Aunt," he said; "there are things to be considered—one must certainly inquire—so, we shall see." Kissing Greta loudly on both cheeks, he went towards the house.

"What makes you want to paint us?" Christian asked, the moment he was gone.

"I think it very wrong," Miss Naylor blurted, suddenly.

"Why?" said Harz, frowning.

"Greta is so young—there are lessons—it is such a waste of time!"

His eyebrows twitched: "Ah! You think so!"

"I don't see why it is a waste of time," said Christian quietly; "there are lots of hours when we sit here and do nothing."

"And it is very dull," put in Greta, with a pout.

"You are rude, Greta," said Miss Naylor in a little rage, pursing her lips, and taking up her knitting.

"I think it seems always rude to speak

the truth," said Greta. Miss Naylor looked at her in that concentrated manner with which she was in the habit of expressing her displeasure.

But at this moment a servant came, and said that Mrs. Decie would be glad to see Herr Harz. The painter made them a stiff bow, and followed the servant to the house. Miss Naylor and the two girls watched his progress with apprehensive eyes; it was clear that he had been offended.

Crossing the veranda, and passing through an open window hung with rich silk curtains, Harz entered a cool dark room. This was Mrs. Decie's sanctum, where she conducted correspondence, received her visitors, read the latest literature, and sometimes, when she had bad headaches, lay for hours upon the sofa, with a fan, and her eyes closed. There was always a scent of sandal-wood, a suggestion of the East, a kind of mystery in here, as if such things as chairs and tables were not really what they seemed to be, but something infinitely less commonplace.

The visitor looked twice, to be quite sure

of anything; there were many plants, bead curtains, and a deal of silverwork and china.

Mrs. Decie came forward in the slightly rustling silk which—whether it was in or out of fashion—always went about with her; a tall woman, over fifty, who moved as if she had been gently tied together at the knees. Her face was long, with fine broad brows, from which her hair, sandy-grey in colour, was waved severely back; she had pale eyes, and a perpetual, pale, and enigmatic smile. Her complexion had been ruined by long residence in India, and might have been unkindly called fawn-coloured. She came up close to Harz, keeping her eyes on his, with her head bent slightly forward.

"We are so pleased to know you," she said, speaking in a voice which had lost its ring. "It is charming to find some one in these parts who can help us to remember that there is such a thing as Art. We had Mr. C—— here last autumn, such a charming fellow," she named an English painter of some reputation. "He was so interested in the native customs and the dresses. You are a subject

painter too, I think? Won't you sit down?"

She went on speaking for some time, introducing painters' names, asking questions, skating round the edge of what was personal. And the young man stood before her with a curious little smile fixed on his lips. "She wants to know whether I 'm worth powder and shot," he thought.

"You wish to paint my nieces?" Mrs. Decie said, leaning back on her settee.

"I wish to have that honour," Harz answered with a bow.

"And what sort of picture did you think of?"

"That," said Harz, "is in the future. I could n't tell you." And he thought: "Will she ask me if I get my tints in Paris, like the woman Tramper told me of?"

The pale perpetual smile on Mrs. Decie's face seemed to invite his confidence, yet to warn him that his words would be sucked in somewhere behind those fine large brows, and sorted carefully. Mrs. Decie was thinking, as a matter of fact: "An interesting young man, a regular Bohemian—no harm in that

at his age; something Napoleonic in the face; probably has no dress clothes. Yes, should like to see some more of him!" She had indeed a fine eye for the points of celebrity, and though his name was unfamiliar, and would probably have been scouted by that famous artist Mr. C——, she felt her instinct urging her to know him. She was, to do her justice, one of those "lion" finders who seek the animal for pleasure, not for the glory that it brings them; and she had the courage of her instincts—leonentities indeed were indispensable to her, but she trusted to her divination to secure them, and nobody could foist a "lion" upon her.

"I think it will be very nice," she said at last. "You will stay and have some lunch? The arrangements here of course are rather odd. Such a mixed household—but there is always lunch at two o'clock for any one who likes, and we all dine at seven. You would have your sittings in the afternoons, perhaps? I should so like to see your sketches. You are using the old house on the wall for studio; that is so original of you!"

Harz would not stay to lunch, but asked if he might begin work that afternoon; he felt a little suffocated by this sphinx-like woman's sandal-wood and sympathy.

Walking home along the river wall, the singing of the larks and thrushes, the rush of waters, and the humming of the chafers were in his ears. He would do something with this picture; something that would live. And before his eyes the faces of the two girls started up, framed by the sky, with young leaves fluttering against their cheeks.

CHAPTER V

GRETA'S FEAST

THREE days had passed since Harz began to paint the picture, when Greta came, one morning early. Coming from Villa Rubein along the river dyke Greta sat down on a bench from which the old house on the wall was visible. She had not been long there before Harz came out.

"I did not knock," said Greta, "because you would not have heard, and it is so early, so I have been waiting for you a quarter of an hour."

She held some flowers in her hand; selecting a rosebud, she handed it to him. "That is my first rosebud this year," she said; "it is for you because you are painting me. To-day I am thirteen, Herr Harz; there is not to be a sitting, because it is my birthday; but, instead, we are all going to Meran to see the play of

Andreas Hofer. You are to come too, please; I am here to tell you, and the others shall be here directly."

Harz bowed: "And the others, who are they?"

"Christian, and Dr. Edmund, Miss Naylor, and Cousin Teresa. Her husband is ill, so she is sad, but to-day she is going to forget that. It is not good to be always sad, is it, Herr Harz?"

He laughed: "*You* could not be."

Greta answered gravely: "Oh! yes, I could, I too am often sad; you are making fun. You are not to make fun to-day, because it is my birthday. Do you think growing up is nice, Herr Harz?"

"No, Fräulein Greta, it is better to have all the time before you."

They walked on side by side.

"I think," said Greta, "you are very much afraid of losing time. Chris says that time is nothing."

"Time is everything," responded Harz.

"She says that time is nothing, and thought is everything," Greta murmured, rubbing a

rose against her cheek, "but *I* think you cannot have a thought unless you have the time to think it in. There are the others! Look!"

A cluster of sunshades passing on the bridge glowed for a moment and was lost in shadow.

"Come," said Harz, "let 's join them!"

At Meran, under Schloss Tyrol, people were streaming across the meadows to an open theatre. Here were tall fellows in mountain dress, with leather jackets, bare knees, and eagles' feathers in their hats; here were fruit-sellers, and burghers with their wives, mountebanks and actors, and every kind of visitor. The audience, packed into an enclosure of high boards, sweltered in the burning sun. Cousin Teresa, tall and thin, with hard, red cheeks, and pleasant eyes, was compelled to shade them with her hand. She had lost her sunshade on the way, and Dawney made a shield for her with his straw hat.

"It 's too much to my interest," he said in his deliberate voice, "that you should get a sunstroke; I can't permit it."

The play began. It depicted the rising in the Tyrol of 1809: the village life, dances and yodelling; the murmurings and exhortations, the warning beat of drums; then the gathering, with flintlocks, pitchforks, knives; the battle and the victory; the home-coming, and the festival. Then the second gathering, the roar of cannon; betrayal, capture, death. The impressive figure of the patriot Andreas Hofer was always in the front, black-bearded, leathern-girdled, under the blue sky, and against a screen of mountains.

Harz and Christian sat behind the others. He seemed so intent on the play that she did not like to speak. She watched his face; it was rigid with a kind of cold excitement; he seemed to be transported by the life that was passing there before them. Something of his feeling seized on her too, and when the play was over she was trembling. In pushing their way out they were separated from the others.

"There 's a short cut to the station here," said Christian; "can't we go this way?"

The path rose a little; a narrow stream

crept alongside in the meadow, the hedge was spangled with wild roses. Christian had a feeling that was more than curiosity. Why was Herr Harz so moved? Since their meeting on the river wall her thoughts had never been at rest. This stranger, with his keen face, insistent eyes, and ceaseless energy, seemed to have roused in her some strange and pressing need; his words had put a shape to something in her mind that she had never yet expressed. She could not find the courage to begin. They reached a stile, and Christian stood aside to make way for some peasant boys, dusty and rough-haired, who sang and whistled as they passed.

"I was like those boys once," said Harz.

Christian turned to him quickly. "Ah! that was why you felt the play, so much."

"It 's my country up there. I was born amongst the mountains. I looked after the cows, and slept in hay-cocks, and cut the trees in winter. They used to call me a 'black sheep,' a 'loafer' in my village."

"Why?"

"Ah! why? I worked as hard as any of

them. But I wanted to get away. Do you think I could have stayed there all my life?"

Christian's eyes grew eager.

"If people don't understand what it is you want to do, they call you a loafer!" muttered Harz.

"But you did what you meant to do in spite of them," Christian said.

For herself it was so hard to finish or decide. When in the old days she told Greta stories, the latter, whose instinct was always for the definite, would say: "And what came at the end, Chris? Do finish it this morning!" but Christian never could. Her thoughts were deep, vague, dreamy, invaded by both sides of every question. Whatever she did, her needlework, her verse-making, her painting, all had its charm; but it was not always what it was intended for at the beginning. Nicholas Treffry had once said of her: "When Chris starts out to make a hat, it may turn out an altar-cloth, but you may bet against a hat." It was her instinct to look for what things meant, and this took all her time. She knew more of herself

than most girls of nineteen, but it was her reason that had told her, not her feelings. For in the rounded safety of her life, her heart had never yet been ruffled except by those rare fits of passion—old Nicholas Treffry had dubbed them "tantrums"—at what seemed to her unjust or mean.

She clasped her hands: "If I were a man," she said, "and going to be great, *I* should have wanted to begin at the very bottom as you did."

"Yes," said Harz quickly, "one should be able to feel *everything*."

And she did not notice how simply he assumed that he was going to be great. He went on, and a smile twisted his mouth unpleasantly beneath its dark moustache:

"Not many people think like you! It 's a crime not to have been born a gentleman."

"That 's a sneer," said Christian; "I did n't think *you* would have sneered!"

"What is the use of pretending that it is n't true?"

"It may be true, but it is finer not to say it!"

"By Heavens!" said Harz, striking one hand into the other, "if more truth were spoken there would not be so many shams."

Christian looked down at him from her seat upon the stile.

"You are right all the same, Fräulein Christian," he said suddenly; "that 's a very little business. Work is what matters, and to try and see the beauty in the world."

Christian's face had changed. She understood this craving after beauty. She slipped down from the stile, and drew a slow deep breath.

"Yes!" she said, walking on. Neither spoke for some time, then Harz said shyly.

"If you and Fräulein Greta would ever like to come and see my studio, I should be so happy. I would try and clean it up for you!"

Christian raised her eyes, and answered: "I should like to come. I could learn something. I want to learn."

They were both silent, and the path now joined the road.

"We must be in front of the others; it 's

nice to be in front—let 's dawdle. I forgot—you never dawdle, I expect, Herr Harz."

"Oh! yes, I do. After a big fit of work, I can dawdle against any one; then I get another fit of work—it 's like one's appetite."

"I 'm always dawdling," answered Christian.

By the roadside a peasant woman screwed up her sun-dried face, saying in a low voice: "Please, gracious lady, help me to lift this basket!"

Christian stooped, but before she could raise it, Harz had hoisted it upon his back.

"All right," he nodded; "this good lady does n't mind."

The woman, looking very much ashamed, walked along by Christian's side; she kept rubbing her brown hands together, and saying in her tired voice: "Gracious lady, I would not have wished it. It is heavy—I would not have wished it; only your help to lift it on my back, because you too are a woman."

Christian touched her sleeve: "I 'm sure he 'd rather carry it," she said.

The woman wiped her face, repeating in her sing-song voice: "It is heavy; I would not have wished it. Only to lift it to my back a little."

They had not gone far along the road before the others passed them in a carriage. Miss Naylor could be seen pursing her lips; Cousin Teresa nodded pleasantly; there was a smile on Dawney's face; and beside him Greta sat demurely. Harz began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Christian.

"You English are so funny. You must n't do this here, you must n't do that there, it 's like sitting in a field of nettles. If I were to walk with you without my coat, that little lady would fall off her seat." His laugh infected Christian; they reached the station feeling they had known each other a long time.

The sun had dipped behind the mountains when the little train steamed down the valley. All were subdued, and Greta, with a nodding head, slept fitfully. Christian,

in her corner, was looking out of the window, and Harz kept studying her profile.

He tried to see her eyes. He had remarked indeed that, whatever their expression, the brows, arched and rather wide apart, gave them a peculiar look of understanding. He thought of his picture. There was nothing in her face to seize upon, it was too sympathetic, too much like light. And yet her chin was firm, almost obstinate.

The train stopped with a jerk; she looked round at him. It was as though she said: "I feel you are my friend."

Herr Paul had killed the fatted calf for Greta's *Fest.* When the whole party were assembled, he alone remained standing; waving his arm above the cloth, he cried: "My dears! Your happiness! There are good things here—Come!" Suddenly, with a sly look and the air of a conjurer producing rabbits, he whipped the cover off the soup tureen:

"Soup—turtle, fat, green fat!" He smacked his lips.

No servants were allowed to-night, because, as Greta said to Harz:

"It is that we are to be glad this evening."

Geniality radiated from Herr Paul's countenance, mellow as a bowl of wine. He toasted everybody; he exhorted them to pleasure.

Harz passed a cracker secretly behind Greta's head, and Miss Naylor, moved by a mysterious impulse, pulled it with a sort of gleeful horror; it exploded, and Greta sprang off her chair. Scruff, seeing this, appeared upon the sideboard with some suddenness, and his forelegs in a plate of soup; without moving them, he turned his head, and his eyes appeared to accuse the company of his false position. It was the signal for a shriek of laughter. Scruff, accepting the position of his forelegs, made no attempt to free them; sniffing at the soup, and finding that nothing happened, he began to lap it.

"Take him out! Oh! take him out": wailed Greta, "he shall be ill!"

"*Allons! Mon cher!*" cried Herr Paul, advancing, "*c'est magnifique, mais, vous savez*

ce n'est pas la guerre!" but Scruff, with a wild spring, leaped past him to the ground.

"Ah!" cried Miss Naylor, "the poor carpet!" A fresh moan of laughter shook the table, for having tasted of this wine of laughter all wanted as much more as they could get. When Scruff and his traces were effaced, Herr Paul took a ladle in his hand.

"I have a toast," he said, waving it for silence; "a toast we will drink all together from our hearts; the toast of my little daughter, who to-day has thirteen years become; and there is also in our hearts," he continued, putting down the ladle and suddenly becoming grave, "the thought of one who is not to-day with us to see this joyful occasion; to her, too, in this our happiness we turn our hearts and glasses because it is her joy that we should yet be joyful. I drink to my little daughter, may God her shadow bless!"

All stood up, and clinking their glasses, drank: then suddenly, in the hush that followed, Greta, according to custom, began

to sing a German carol; at the end of the fourth line she stopped, abashed.

Herr Paul, behind his handkerchief, blew his nose loudly, but in a moment he emerged again, and taking up a cap that had fallen from a cracker, he put it on.

Every one now followed his example, Miss Naylor attaining the distinction of a pair of donkey's ears, which she assumed, after another glass of wine, with an air of sacrificing to the public good.

At the end of supper came the moment for the offering of gifts. Herr Paul had tied a handkerchief round Greta's eyes, and one by one they brought her presents. Greta, under forfeit of a kiss, was bound to tell the giver by what the gift felt like. Her swift, supple little hands noiselessly explored them, and in every case she guessed them right.

Dawney's present, a kitten, made a scene by clawing at her hair.

"That is Dr. Edmund's," she cried at once. Christian saw that Harz had disappeared, but suddenly he came back breathless,

and took his place at the end of the rank of givers.

"How good of you!" she whispered.

Advancing on tiptoe, he put his present into Greta's hands. It was a small bronze copy of a Donatello statue.

"Oh! Herr Harz!" cried Greta; "I saw it in the studio that day. It stood on the table, and it is lovely."

Mrs. Decie, thrusting her pale eyes close to it, murmured: "Charming!"

Mr. Treffry took it in his fingers.

"Rum little toad! Cost a pot of money, I expect!" He eyed Harz doubtfully.

They went into the next room now, and Herr Paul, taking Greta's bandage, transferred it to his eyes.

"Take care—take care, all!" he cried; "I am a devil of a catcher," and, feeling the air cautiously, he moved forward like a bear about to hug. He caught no one. Christian and Greta whisked under his arms and left him grasping at the air. Mrs. Decie slipped past him with astonishing agility. Mr. Treffry, smoking his cigar, and [illegible]

caded in a corner, jeered: "Bravo, Paul! The active beggar! Can't he run! Go it, Greta!"

At last Herr Paul caught Cousin Teresa, who flattened against the wall, lost her head, and stood uttering small shrieks.

Suddenly Mrs. Decie started playing *The Blue Danube*. Herr Paul dropped the handkerchief, twisted his moustache up fiercely, glared round the room, and seizing Greta by the waist, began dancing furiously, bobbing up and down like a cork in lumpy water. Cousin Teresa with Miss Naylor followed suit, very solemn, dancing completely different steps. Harz went up to Christian.

"I can't dance," he said, "that is, I have only danced once, but—if you would try with me!"

She put her hand upon his arm, and they began. She danced light as a feather, eyes shining, feet flying, her body bent a little forward. It was not a great success at first, but as soon as the time got into Harz's feet, they went swinging on when all the rest had stopped for breath. Sometimes one couple or another slipped through the

window to dance on the veranda, and come whirling in again. The lamplight glowed on the girls' white dresses, and on Herr Paul's perspiring face. He constituted in himself a perfect orgy, and when the music stopped flung himself at full length on the sofa gasping:

"My God! But oh! my God!"

Suddenly Christian felt the painter cling to her arm. Glowing and panting she looked at him.

"Giddy!" he said. "I dance so badly; but I 'll soon learn."

Greta clapped her hands: "Every evening we will dance, every evening we will dance."

Harz looked at Christian, and the colour deepened in her face.

"I 'll show you how they dance in my village, feet upon the ceiling!" And running to Dawney, he said:

"Hold me here! Lift me—so! Now, one —two," he tried to swing his feet above his head, but, with an "Ouch!" from Dawney, they collapsed, and sat abruptly on the floor. This untimely event brought the evening

to a close. Dawney left, escorting Cousin Teresa, and Harz strode home humming *The Blue Danube*, with the feeling still of Christian's waist against his arm.

In their room the two girls sat to cool themselves before undressing.

"Ah!" sighed Greta, "this is the happiest birthday I have had."

And Christian thought: "I have never been so happy in my life as I have been to-day. I should like every day to be like this!" Leaning out into the night, she let the cool air blow against her cheeks.

window to dance on the veranda, and come whirling in again. The lamplight glowed on the girls' white dresses, and on Herr Paul's perspiring face. He constituted in himself a perfect orgy, and when the music stopped flung himself at full length on the sofa gasping:

"My God! But oh! my God!"

Suddenly Christian felt the painter cling to her arm. Glowing and panting she looked at him.

"Giddy!" he said. "I dance so badly; but I 'll soon learn."

Greta clapped her hands: "Every evening we will dance, every evening we will dance."

Harz looked at Christian, and the colour deepened in her face.

"I 'll show you how they dance in my village, feet upon the ceiling!" And running to Dawney, he said:

"Hold me here! Lift me—so! Now, one —two," he tried to swing his feet above his head, but, with an "Ouch!" from Dawney, they collapsed, and sat abruptly on the floor. This untimely event brought the evening

to a close. Dawney left, escorting Cousin Teresa, and Harz strode home humming *The Blue Danube*, with the feeling still of Christian's waist against his arm.

In their room the two girls sat to cool themselves before undressing.

"Ah!" sighed Greta, "this is the happiest birthday I have had."

And Christian thought: "I have never been so happy in my life as I have been to-day. I should like every day to be like this!" Leaning out into the night, she let the cool air blow against her cheeks.

CHAPTER VI

PROGRESS OF THE PICTURE

"CHRIS!" said Greta some days after this, "Miss Naylor danced last evening; I think she shall have a headache to-day. There is my French and my history this morning."

"Well, I can take them."

"That is nice," said Greta; "then we can talk. I am sorry about the headache. I shall give her some of my *Eau de Cologne.*"

Miss Naylor's headaches after dancing were things on which to calculate. The girls carried their books into the arbour; it was a showery day; they had to run for shelter through the raindrops and the sunlight. Greta shook her hair.

"The French first, Chris!" She liked her French, in which she was not far inferior to Christian; the lesson therefore proceeded in

an admirable fashion. After one hour exactly by her watch (Mr. Treffry's birthday present—loved and admired at least once every hour that it recorded)—an hour, that is, including time for coming out, and time for settling down, and time for getting up—Greta rose.

"Chris," she said solemnly, "I have not fed my rabbits."

"Be quick!" said Christian; "there's not much time for history."

Greta vanished. Christian watched the bright drops dripping from the roof; her lips were parted in a smile. She was thinking of something Harz had said the night before. A discussion having started as to whether average opinion did, or did not, safeguard morals and Society, Harz, after sitting silent, had suddenly burst out: "I think one man in earnest is better than twenty half-hearted men who follow tamely, and I say that in the end he does Society the most good."

Dawney had answered: "If you had your way there would be no Society. You preach:

No rules! Each man to follow his own line!"

"I say Society would be finer than it is; it would not live upon the weak."

"Bah!" Herr Paul chimed in; "the weak goes to the wall; that is as certain as that you and I are here."

"Let them fall against the wall," cried Harz; "don't push them there. . . ."

Greta reappeared, walking pensive in the rain.

"Bino," she said, sighing, "has eaten such a lot. I remember now, I did feed them before. *Must* we do the history, Chris?"

"Of course!"

Greta opened her book, and put a finger in the page. "Herr Harz is very kind to me," she said. "Yesterday he brought a bird which had come into his studio with a hurt wing; he brought it very gently in his handkerchief—he is very kind, the bird was not even frightened of him. You did not know about that, Chris?"

Chris flushed a little, and said in a hurt voice:

"I don't see what it had to do with me."

"No," assented Greta.

Christian's colour deepened: "Go on with your history, Greta."

"Only," pursued Greta, "that he always tells you all about things, Chris."

"He does n't! How can you say such things!"

"I think he does, and it is because you do not make him angry. It is very easy to make him angry; you have only to think differently, and he shall be angry at once."

"You are a little cat!" said Christian; "that is n't true, at all. It 's only that he hates shams, and can't bear meanness; and it is mean to cover up dislikes and pretend that you agree with people."

"Papa says that he thinks too much about himself."

"Father!" began Christian hotly; biting her lips she stopped, and turned her wrathful eyes on Greta.

"*You* do not always show your dislikes, Chris."

"I? What has that to do with it? Be-

cause one is a coward that does n't make it any better, does it?"

"I think that he has a great many dislikes," murmured Greta.

"I wish you would attend to your own faults, and not pry into other peoples'," and pushing the book aside, Christian gazed in front of her.

Some minutes passed, then Greta leaning over rubbed a cheek against her shoulder.

"I am very sorry, Chris—I only wanted to be talking. Shall I read some history?"

"Yes," said Christian coldly.

"Are you angry with me, Chris?"

There was no answer. The lingering raindrops pattered on the roof. Greta pulled her sister's sleeve.

"Look, Chris!" she said. "There *is* Herr Harz!"

Christian looked up, dropped her eyes again, and said: "Will you go on with the history, Greta?"

Greta sighed.

"Yes, I will—but oh! Chris, there is the

luncheon gong!" and she meekly closed the book.

During the weeks that followed there was a "sitting" nearly every afternoon in a corner of the garden. Miss Naylor usually attended them; the little lady, to a certain extent, was carried past objection. She came to take an interest in the picture, and would watch out of the corner of her eye the strokes of Harz's brush; but in the depths of her dear mind she never got quite used to all the vanity and waste of time; her lips would move, her knitting-needles click suppressed remonstrances.

It was a quality in Harz that what he did fast he did best; if he had leisure there came a moment when he "saw too much"; he loved his work so passionately that he could not tell exactly where to stop; he could not bear to lay a thing aside, always thinking: "I can get it better." Greta's face was finished, but with Christian's, try as he would, he was not satisfied; from day to day it seemed to change, as if her soul were changing.

There were things too in her eyes that he could neither read nor reproduce.

Dawney would often stroll out to them after his almost daily visit, and lie down on the grass, his feet crossed, his arms behind his neck, a big cigar between his lips. Greta and he could never meet without a fight. Tea came out at five o'clock, and Mrs. Decie would appear with a magazine or novel, for she was proud of literary knowledge. The sitting was suspended; Harz, with a cigarette, would move between the table and the picture, drinking his tea, putting a touch in here and there; he never sat down till all was over for the day. During these "rests" there was much talk, which usually ended in discussion. Mrs. Decie was happiest in conversations of a literary order, and would make frequent use of such expressions as: "After all, it produces an illusion—does anything else much matter?" "Rather a *poseur*, is he not?" "A question, that, of temperament," or, "A matter of the definition of words"; and other charming generalities, which sound so well, and seem to go so

far, and are so pleasingly irrefutable. Sometimes the discussion turned on Art—on points of colour or technique; whether realism was quite justified; and should we be pre-Raphaelites. When these discussions started, Christian's eyes would be like stars; they would grow bigger, clearer, with a sort of shining reasonableness; as though indeed they tried to see the bottom of the matter. And Harz would stare at them, and try to fix that look upon his canvas. But it eluded him as though her eyes had no more depth than Mrs. Decie's eyes, which, with their pale and watchful smile, seemed always to be saying: "Come, let us take a little intellectual exercise."

Greta, sitting on the grass, and pulling Scruffy's ears, would gaze up at the speakers; when the talk was over, she always shook herself. But if no one, not even Miss Naylor, came to the sittings, there would be sometimes very earnest and quick talk, sometimes strange long silences.

One day Christian said: "What is your religion?"

Harz finished carefully the touch that he was putting on the canvas, before he answered: "Roman Catholic, I suppose; I was baptised in that Church."

"I did n't mean that; what do you believe? Do you think there is a future life?"

"Christian," murmured Greta, who was plaiting blades of grass, "shall always want to know what people think about a future life; that is so funny!"

"How can I tell?" said Harz; "I 've never really thought of it—I 've never had the time."

"How can you help thinking?" Christian said: "I *have* to—it seems to me so awful that we might come to an end."

She closed her book, and it slipped off her lap. She went on: "There must be a future life, we 're so incomplete. What is the good of your work for instance? What is the use of developing if you have to stop?"

"I don't know," answered Harz. "I don't much care. What I do know is, I 've got to work."

"But why?"

"It 's happiness, that 's why—the real happiness is fighting—the rest is nothing. If you have finished a thing, does it ever satisfy you? You look forward to the next at once; to wait is wretched!"

Christian clasped her hands behind her neck; and the sunlight flickered through the leaves on to the bosom of her dress.

"Ah! Stay like that!" cried Harz.

She let her eyes rest on his face, swinging her foot a little.

"You work because you must; but that is not enough. Why do you feel you must? I want to know what is behind. When I was travelling with Aunt Constance the winter before last we often talked—I 've heard her discuss it with her friends. I used to think her theory right; she says we move in circles till we reach Nirvana. But last winter I found I could n't talk to her, it seemed as if she never really meant it. Then I started reading — Kant and Hegel——"

"Ah!" put in Harz, "if they would teach me to draw better, or to see a new colour in a

flower, or an expression in a face, I would read them all."

Christian leaned forward: "It must be right to get as near the truth as possible; every step we gain is something. You believe in truth; truth is the same as beauty—that was what you said—you try to paint the truth, you always see the beauty. How can we know any part of the truth, unless we know too what is at the root of it?"

"I—think," murmured Greta, *sotto voce*, "you see one way—and he sees another—because—you are not one person."

"Of course!" said Christian impatiently, "but why——"

Nicholas Treffry was coming from the house, holding the *Times* in one hand, in the other a huge meerschaum pipe, and humming as he walked.

"Ah-a!" he said to Harz. "Glad to see you; how goes the picture?" and he lowered himself into a chair.

"Better to-day, Uncle?" said Christian softly.

"*I 'm* all right, my dear. Confounded

humbugs, doctors! Your father used to swear by them; why, his doctor killed him—made him drink such stuff! An awful duffer in some ways, your father, Chris."

"Why then do you *have* a doctor, Uncle Nic?" asked Greta.

Mr. Treffry looked at her; his eyes were twinkling. "I don't know, my dear. If they get half a chance, they won't let go of you!" Humming faintly to himself, he spread his paper.

There had been a gentle breeze all day, but now it had quite died away; not a leaf quivered, not a blade of grass was stirring; from the house were heard faint sounds as of some one playing on a pipe. A blackbird came hopping down the path within three yards of them.

"When you were a boy, did you go after birds' nests, Uncle Nic?" Greta whispered.

"I believe you, Greta." The blackbird hopped into the shrubbery.

"You frightened him, Uncle Nic! Papa says that at Schloss Kõnig, where he lived

when he was young, he would be always after jackdaws' nests."

"Gammon, Greta. Your father never took a jackdaw's nest, his legs are much too round!"

"Are you fond of birds, Uncle Nic?"

"Ask me another, Greta! Well, I s'pose so."

"Then why did you go birds'-nesting? *I* think that it is cruel."

Mr. Treffry coughed behind his paper: "There you have me, Greta," he remarked.

Harz began gathering his brushes: "Thank you," he said, "that 's all that I can do to-day."

"Can I look?" Mr. Treffry enquired.

"Oh! Certainly!"

Uncle Nic got slowly up, and stood before the picture. "When it 's for sale," he said at last, "I 'll buy it."

Harz bowed, and for some reason felt annoyed, as if he had been asked to part with something very personal.

"I thank you," he said. A gong sounded in the house.

"You 'll stay and have a snack with us?"

said Mr. Treffry; "the doctor 's stopping," and gathering up his paper, he moved off to the house with his hand on Greta's shoulder, the terrier running on in front. Harz and Christian were left alone. He was scraping his palette, and she still sitting with her elbows on her knees; between them, a gleam of sunlight dyed the pathway golden; already it was evening; the bushes and the flowers, after the day's heat, were breathing out their perfume; the birds had started evensong.

"Are you tired of sitting for your portrait, Fräulein Christian?"

Christian shook her head.

"I shall get something into it that everybody does not see—something that 's behind the surface, and will last."

Christian said slowly: "That 's like a challenge. You were right when you said 'Happiness is fighting'—for yourself, but not for me. I 'm a coward. I hate to hurt people, I like them to like me. If *you* had to do anything that would make them hate you, you would do it all the same, if it helped

your work; that 's fine—it 's what I can't do. It 's—it 's everything. Do you like Uncle Nic?"

The young painter looked shrewdly towards the house, where under the veranda old Nicholas Treffry was still in sight, and a smile came on his lips.

"If I were the finest painter in the world, he would n't think anything of me for it, I 'm afraid; but if I could show him handfuls of big cheques for bad pictures I had painted, he would respect me."

"You don't know him." She paused, then said: "I love him."

"Then I shall like him," Harz answered simply.

She put her hand out, and her fingers met his for a moment.

"We shall be late," she said, glowing with colour, and catching up her book: "I 'm always late!"

CHAPTER VII

THE DISCOVERY

THERE was one other guest at dinner, a well-groomed man with a pale, fattish face, dark eyes, and hair thin on the temples, whose clothes were of a military cut. He looked like one who, fond of easy life, had got out of his groove, and collided with the hard and crushing. Herr Paul introduced him as Count Mario Sarelli.

Two hanging lamps with crimson shades threw a rosy light across the table; where in the centre stood a silver basket full of purple irises.

Through the open windows the garden seemed all clusters of black foliage in the dying daylight. Moths came in and circled round the lamps; and Greta, following their fluttering with her eyes, gave loud sighs of pleasure when they escaped unhurt. Both

girls wore white, and Harz, who sat opposite to Christian, kept looking at her, and wondering why he had not painted her in white.

Mrs. Decie understood the art of dining—the dinner, ordered by Herr Paul, was excellent; the servants were as silent as their shadows; there was always a gentle hum of conversation.

Sarelli, who sat on her right hand, seemed to partake of little except olives, of which he ate a number, dipping them first into a glass of sherry. He turned his black and solemn eyes silently from face to face, and now and then asked the meaning of some English word he did not understand. After a discussion upon modern Rome, it was debated whether or no a criminal could be told by the expression of his face.

"Crime," said Mrs. Decie, passing her hand across her brow—"crime is but the hallmark of strong individuality."

Miss Naylor, looking shocked, and flushing rather pink, stammered: "A crime—a great crime always shows itself—a murder. Why, of course!"

"If that 's so," said Dawney, "we 've only got to look about us—no more detectives."

Miss Naylor rejoined with slight severity: "I cannot conceive that such a thing can pass the human face by, leaving no impression!"

Harz said abruptly: "There are worse things than murder."

"Ah! *par exemple!*" said Sarelli in his hissing voice, fixing his eyes on Harz; "and what then do you say is worse?"

"Meanness," said the artist, getting red.

"Ah, ah!" There was a slight stir round the table.

"Verry good—verry good," cried out Herr Paul, holding up a glass of wine; "à *vot' santé, cher.*"

Miss Naylor shivered slightly, as if some one had put a penny down her back; Dawney laughed; and Mrs. Decie, leaning towards Harz, smiled like one who has made a pet dog do a trick. Christian alone was motionless, looking thoughtfully at Harz.

"I saw a man tried for murder once, a

murder for revenge; I watched the judge, and thought all the time: 'I 'd rather be that murderer than you; I 've never seen a meaner face; you *crawl* through life; you 're not a criminal, because you have n't got the courage.'"

In the dubious silence following the painter's speech, Mr. Treffry could be heard distinctly humming. Then Sarelli said, pronouncing every word distinctly: "Ah! You would let them go, these murderers, *hein*? Anarchists too perhaps, who are not men, but savage beasts, whom I would tear to pieces."

"As to that," said Harz defiantly, "it may be wise to hang them, but there are so many men about that it would be wise to hang."

"How can we tell what they went through, and what their lives were?" murmured Christian.

Miss Naylor, who had been rolling up a little pellet of bread, concealed it hastily; "They are—always given a chance to—repent—I believe," she said.

" 'For what they are about to receive'" —drawled Dawney.

Mrs. Decie motioned with her fan: "We are trying to express the inexpressible—shall we go into the garden?"

All rose; Harz stood by the window, and in passing, Christian whispered: "Thank you!"

The painter sat down again with a sudden sense of loss. There was no white figure opposite him now. He raised his eyes and met Sarelli's. The Italian was regarding him with a curious stare.

Herr Paul began retailing a piece of scandal he had evidently heard that afternoon.

"Shocking affair!" he said; "I could never have believed it of her!" and he tapped his snowy shirt front. "Bolton is quite beside himself. Yesterday there was, it seems, a row!"

"There has been one every day for months," muttered Dawney.

"But to leave without a word, and go no one knows where! Bolton is '*viveur*' no doubt, *mais, mon Dieu, que voulez-vous?* She was always a poor, pale thing. Why I,

when—when my—" he flourished his cigar; "I was not always—always—what I should have been—one lives in a world of flesh and blood—we are not all angels—*que diable!*—It is a very vulgar business, this—She goes off; leaves everything—without a word; and Bolton is very fond of her. I tell you, these things are not done!" the starched bosom of his shirt seemed swollen by his indignation.

Mr. Treffry, with a heavy hand upon the table, eyed him sideways. Dawney said slowly:

"Bolton is a beast; I 'm sorry for the poor woman; but what can she do alone?"

"There 's no doubt a man," put in Sarelli.

Herr Paul muttered: "Ah! Who knows?"

"What is Bolton going to do?" said Dawney.

"Ah! Bolton," said Herr Paul, "Bolton is fond of her. He is a chap of resolution, he will get her back. He told me: 'Well, you know, I shall follow her wherever she goes till she comes back.' He will do it, he is a determined chap, Bolton; he will follow her wherever she goes."

Mr. Treffry drank his wine off at a gulp, and sucked his moustache in sharply.

"She was a fool to marry him," said Dawney; "they have n't a point in common; she hates him like poison, and she 's the better of the two. But it does n't pay a woman to run off like that. She 's made her own bed. Bolton had better hurry up, though. What do you think, sir?" he said to Mr. Treffry; "what should a fellow do under the circumstances ?"

"Eh?" said Mr. Treffry; "how should I know? Ask Paul there, he 's one of your moral men, or Count Sarelli."

"I ?" the latter said impassively. "If I cared for her I should very likely kill her—if not—" he shrugged his shoulders.

Harz, who was watching, was reminded of his other words at dinner, "wild beasts whom I would tear to pieces." He looked with interest at the quiet man who said ferocious things, and thought: "I should like to paint that fellow."

Herr Paul twirled his wine-glass in his fingers: "Prrt!" he said, grimacing, "there

are family ties, there is society, there is decency; a wife should be with her husband. Bolton will do quite right. He must go after her; she will not perhaps come back at first; he will stay, he will follow her; she will begin to think, 'I am helpless—and ridiculous!' Bah! A woman is soon beaten. They will return. She is once more with her husband—Society will forgive, it will be all right."

"By Jove, Paul," growled Mr. Treffry, "I congratulate you on your powers of argument."

"Ah!" said Dawney, flicking at the terrier with his table napkin.

"A wife is a wife," pursued Herr Paul; "a man has a right to her society."

"What do you say to that, sir?" Dawney asked.

Mr. Treffry tugged at his beard: "Eh?" he said; "make a woman live with you, if she don't want to? If you ask me, I call it low."

"Bah! my dear," exclaimed Herr Paul, "how should you know? You have not been married."

"No, thank the Lord!" Mr. Treffry replied.

"But looking at the question broadly, sir," said Dawney; "if a husband always lets his wife do as she likes, how would the thing work out? What becomes of the marriage tie?"

"The marriage tie," growled Mr. Treffry, "is the biggest thing there is! But, by Jove, Doctor, I 'm a Dutchman if hunting women ever helped the marriage tie!"

"I am not thinking of myself," Herr Paul cried out, "I think of the community. There are rights."

"A sane community never yet asked a man to tread upon his self-respect. If I get my fingers skinned over my marriage, which I undertook at my own risk, what 's the community to do with it? D 'ye think I 'm going to whine to it to put the plaster on? And as to rights, it 'd be a deuced sight better for us all if there was n't such a fuss about 'em. Leave that to women! I don't give a tinker's dam for men who talk about their rights in such a matter."

Sarelli rose: "But your honour," he said, "there is your honour!"

Mr. Treffry stared at him.

"Honour!" he grunted. "If hunting women's your idea of honour, well—it is n't mine."

"Then you 'd forgive her, sir, whatever happened," Dawney said.

"Forgiveness! That 's another thing. I leave that to your sanctimonious beggars. But, hunt a woman! Hang it, sir, I 'm not a snob!" and he brought his hand down with a rattle: "This is a subject that don't bear talking of."

Sarelli fell back in his seat, twirling his moustaches fiercely. Harz, who had risen, rested his eyes on Christian's empty place.

"If I were married," he thought suddenly.

Herr Paul, with a somewhat vinous glare, still muttered, "But your duty to the family!"

Harz slipped through the window. The moon was like a wonderful white lantern in the purple of the sky, and there was but a smoulder of the stars. Beneath the softness of the air was the iciness of snow; it made

him want to run and leap. A sleepy beetle dropped in front of him; he turned it over with his toe and watched it scurrying across the grass.

Within the house some one was playing Schumann's *Kinderscenen*. Harz stood still to listen. The notes came twining, weaving round his thoughts; the night seemed full of girlish voices, hopes and fancies, soaring away to mountain heights—invisible, yet present. Between the stems of the acacia trees he could see the flicker of white dresses, Christian and Greta were walking arm in arm. He took a step toward them; the blood flushed up in his face, he felt almost surfeited by some sweet emotion. Then he stood still in sudden horror. He was in love! With nothing done—with everything before him! He was going to bow down to a face! The flicker of the dresses was no longer visible. He would not be fettered, he would stamp it out! He turned away, and with each step he took, he felt how hard the stamping out would be.

Round the corner of the house, in the

shadow of the wall, Dominique, the Luganese, in his embroidered slippers, smoking his long pipe of cherry-wood, was leaning up against a tree, like some Mephistopheles in evening clothes. Harz went up to him.

"Lend me a pencil, Dominique," he said.

"*Bien, M'sieu,*" said Dominique.

Resting a card against the tree Harz wrote to Mrs. Decie: "Pardon, I am obliged to go away. In a few days I shall hope to return, and finish the picture of your nieces."

He sent Dominique to get his hat. During the few seconds that the Luganese was absent Harz was on the point of tearing up the card and going back into the house.

When Dominique returned he thrust the card into his hand, and without a word walked swiftly to the entrance, where the tall poplars stood waiting, ragged ghosts all silver in the moonlight.

CHAPTER VIII

RESTLESS JOURNEY

HARZ walked away along the road. A dog was howling. The sound seemed to the painter too appropriate. He put his fingers to his ears, but the lugubrious noise passed those barriers, and made its way into his heart. Was there nothing that would put an end to this emotion in him? He hurried on, but when he reached the old house on the wall, it was no better, and he spent the night tramping up and down.

Just before daybreak he slipped out with a knapsack, taking the road towards Meran.

He had not quite passed through Gries when he overtook a man who was walking slowly in the middle of the road leaving the perfume of cigars behind him.

"Ah! my friend," the smoker said, "you walk early; are you going my way?"

It was Count Sarelli. The raw light had imparted a grey tinge to his pale face, the growth of his beard showed black beneath the skin; his thumbs were hooked in the pockets of a closely buttoned coat, and he gesticulated with his fingers.

"You are making a journey?" he said politely, nodding at the knapsack. "You are early—I am late; our friend has admirable *kümmel*—I have drunk too much. You have not been to bed, I think? If there is no sleep in one's bed it is no good going to look for it. You find that? It is better to drink *kümmel!* . . . Pardon! You are doing the right thing: get away! Get away as fast as possible! Don't wait and let it catch you!"

Harz stared at him amazed.

"Pardon!" Sarelli said again, raising his hat, "that girl—the white girl—I saw. You do well to get away!" he swayed a little as he walked. "That old fellow—what is his name—Tr-r-reffr-ry! What ideas of honour!" He mumbled: "Honour is an abstraction! If a man is not true to an abstraction, he is a low type. Wait a minute!"

He put his hand upon his side as though he were in pain.

The hedges on either side were brightening with the faintest pinky glow, the long road was deserted, there was no sound but that of their own footsteps; suddenly a bird commenced to chirp, another answered—the world seemed full of little voices.

Sarelli stopped.

"That white girl," he said, speaking with rapidity. "Yes! You do well! get away! Don't let it catch you! I waited, it caught me—what happened? Everything horrible —and now—" he threw up his hands—"*kümmel!*" And laughing a thick laugh, he gave a twirl to his moustache, and swaggered on.

"I was a fine fellow—nothing too big for Mario Sarelli; the regiment waited for me—they looked to me. Then *she* came—with her eyes and her white dress, always white like this one; the little mole on her chin, her hands for ever moving—their touch as warm as sunbeams. Then, no longer Mario Sarelli this, Mario Sarelli that! The little house close

to the ramparts! Two arms, two eyes, and nothing in the heart but flames that made their ashes quickly—in *her*, like this ash here—" he flicked the white flake off the end of his cigar. "It 's droll! You agree that it is droll? Some day I shall go back and kill her. In the meantime—I want her! and so—*kümmel!*"

He stopped at the gate of a house close to the road, and stood quite still, his teeth bared in a grin.

"Pardon!" he said, "I bore you!" His cigar, flung down, sputtered forth its sparks along the road in front of Harz. "I live here, and so—good-morning! You are a man for work—Your honour is your Art! *I* know, and you are young! The man who loves flesh better than his honour is a low type—I am a low type. I! Mario Sarelli, a low type! I love flesh better than my honour!"

He remained swaying at the gate with the grin fixed on his face; then raised his head, staggered up the steps, and banged the door. But a moment later, he appeared again and

beckoned from the doorway. Harz obeyed an impulse, and went in.

"What will you drink?" Sarelli asked. "It is good of you to come; we will make a night of it; wine, brandy, *kümmel?* I am virtuous, so *kümmel* it must be for me!"

He sat down at a piano, and began to touch the keys. Harz poured out some wine. Sarelli nodded.

"You begin with that? *Allegro—piu—presto!* Wine—brandy—*kümmel!*" he quickened the time of the tune that he was playing; "it is not too long a passage, and *this*—" he took his hands from off the keys—"comes after."

Harz smiled:

"Some men do not kill themselves," he said.

Sarelli answered with politeness:

"You think?" and began to play a tarantella, bending and swaying to the music. Breaking off he let his eyes rest on the painter, and started playing Schumann's *Kinderscenen.* Harz leapt to his feet.

"Stop!" he said.

"That pricks you?" said Sarelli suavely; "what do you think of *this?*" he played again, crouching over the piano, and making every note sound like the crying of a wounded animal.

"That 's for me!" he said, swinging slowly round, and rising.

"Your health! And so you don't believe in suicide, but in murder? The custom is the other way; but you don't believe in customs? Customs are only for Society?" He drank a glass of *kümmel.* "You do not love Society?"

Harz looked at him intently; did he want to quarrel?

"I am not too fond of other people's thoughts put into me," he said at last; "I prefer to think my own."

"And is Society never right? That poor Society!"

"Society! What is Society—a few men in good coats? What has it done for me?"

Sarelli crossed his legs, and bit the end off a cigar.

"Ah!" he said; "now we come to it. It

is good to be an artist, a fine bantam of an artist; where other men have their dis-ci-pline, he has his, what shall we say—his mound of roses?"

The painter started to his feet.

"Yes," said Sarelli, with a hiccough, "you are a fine fellow!"

"And you are drunk!" cried Harz.

"Yes," the other said, "a little drunk—not much, not enough to matter!"

Harz broke into a fit of laughter. It was crazy to stay there listening to this mad fellow. What had brought him in?—he moved towards the door.

"Ah!" said Sarelli, "it is no good going to bed—let us talk. I have a lot to say—it is pleasant to talk to anarchists at times."

Full daylight was already coming through the shutter chinks.

"You are all anarchists, you painters, and you writing fellows. You live by playing ball with facts. Images—nothing solid —*hein?* You 're all for new things too, to tickle up your nerves. No discipline! True anarchists, every one of you!"

Harz poured out another glass of wine and drank it off. He too began to feel a feverish excitement.

"Only fools," he said, "take things for granted. As for discipline, what do you aristocrats, or you bourgeois know of discipline? Have you ever been hungry? Have you ever had your soul down on its back?"

Sarelli bent his head courteously:

"Soul on its back? That is good!"

"A man's no good," cried Harz, "if he's always thinking of what others think; a man must stand on his own legs."

"He must not then consider other people?" murmured Sarelli thickly.

"Not from cowardice anyway."

Sarelli drank some *kümmel.*

"What would you do," he said striking his chest, "if you—you had a devil—here? Would you go to bed?"

Harz stared. And a sort of pity seized on him. He wanted to say something that would be consoling but he could find no words; and suddenly he felt disgust. What link was there between him and this man;

between his love and this man's love? Sarelli seemed to guess his thoughts.

"Harz!" he muttered, leaning forward with a disagreeable smile: "Harz!—that means 'tar,' *hein?* Your family is not an old one?"

Harz glared at him, and said: "My father is a peasant."

Sarelli lifting the *kümmel* bottle, emptied it into his glass, with a curiously steady hand.

"You 're honest—and we both have devils. I forgot; I brought you in to let you see a picture!"

He threw wide the shutters; the windows were already open, and a rush of air came in.

"Ah!" he said, sniffing, "smells of the earth, *nicht wahr, Herr Artist? You* should know—it belongs to you—your father. . . . Come! here 's my picture; a Correggio!"

Harz looked.

"What do you think of it?" Sarelli asked, with a queer smile.

"It 's clever; allow me to ask, do you set much store by it?"

"*Allons!* A Correggio!"

"I am sorry, but that is a copy."

Sarelli curling his moustaches, said:

"Ah ! you think ?"

"Think !" cried Harz; "I *know.*"

"Then you have given me the lie, Signor," and drawing out his handkerchief Sarelli flicked it in the painter's face.

Harz turned white.

"Duelling is a custom!" said Sarelli. "It is a manner too. You don't know any manners; I shall have the honour to teach you just this one, unless you are afraid. Here are pistols—this is a good room, it is twenty feet across at least, twenty feet is no bad distance."

And pulling out a drawer he took two pistols from a case, and put them on the table:

"The light is good—but perhaps you are afraid."

"Give me one!" shouted the infuriated painter; "and go to the devil for a fool."

"One moment!" Sarelli murmured blandly; "I will load them, they 're more useful loaded."

Harz leaned out of the window; his head

was in a whirl. "What on earth is happening?" he thought. "Either he 's a madman, or I 'm drunk! Confound him! I 'm not going to be killed. What 's to be done?" He turned, and went towards the table. With his head sunk on his arms Sarelli was asleep. Harz stared, and methodically took up the pistols to put them back into the drawer. A sound made him turn his head, there stood a tall and strong young woman in a loose gown caught together on her chest. Her grey eyes glanced from the painter to the bottles, from the bottles to the pistol-case. This simple reasoning struck Harz as comical.

"It is often like this," she said in country patois; "*der Herr* must not be frightened."

And taking up the motionless Sarelli as if he were a baby, she laid him on a couch.

"Ah!" she said sitting down and resting her elbow on the table; "he will not wake!"

Harz bowed to her, for her patient figure, in spite of all its youth and strength, seemed to him pathetic. Then taking up his knap-

sack, he went out of the house. He felt positively sick.

The smoke of cottages rose straight, the mist was wandering in wisps about the valley, the songs of birds dropped down like blessings. In the night the spiders had spun over the grass a sea of threads that bent and quivered to the air, like fairy tight-ropes.

Harz tramped all day. Passing a village forge he saw the smith, a tall stout man with knotted muscles, sleepy eyes, and great fair beard, come out to stretch and wipe his brow.

"*Grüss Gott!*" called Harz.

"*Grüss Gott!*" the smith said, and stolidly turned back into the forge.

In the road a team of white oxen, waiting to be harnessed, slowly lashed their tails against their flanks, and moved their heads from side to side; an old woman at her cottage door blinked placidly, and knitted.

The white houses, with gaping caves of storage underneath the roofs, the red church spire, the clinking of the hammers in the forge, the slow stamping of the oxen—all spoke of

sleepy toil, without ambition or ideas. He knew it all so well; like the earth's odour, it belonged to him, as Sarelli had remarked. But Harz asked himself if he had ever really been a part of life like this.

Towards sunset coming to a copse of larches, he sat down at the edge to rest. It was very still, but for the tinkle of the cowbells; and, from somewhere in the distance, the hollow sound of dropping logs.

Two little boys came from the wood, they marched earnestly along the narrow path, barefoot, looking at Harz as if he were some kind of monster. When once past him, they began to run.

"At their age," he thought, "I should have done the same." And a hundred memories rushed into his mind.

He looked down at the village straggling below—white houses with their russet tiles and crowns of smoke, at the vineyards where the young leaves were beginning to shoot forth, at the red-capped spire, the thread of bubbling stream, the old stone cross. He had been fourteen years struggling up from

that; and now just as he had breathing space —the time to give himself wholly to his art—this weakness was upon him! Better, a thousand times, to give her up!

In a house or two the lights began to wink; the scent of wood smoke reached him, the distant chimes of bells, the burring of the stream.

He slept out on the hillside, under the bright moon.

CHAPTER IX

SCHLOSS RUNKELSTEIN

THE next morning his one thought was to get back to his work. He arrived at the studio in the afternoon, and, laying in provisions, barricaded the lower door and set to work to paint. For three days he did not go out; on the fourth day he went to Villa Rubein. . . .

Schloss Runkelstein—grey, blind, strengthless—still kept the valley. The windows which once, like eyes, had watched men and horses creeping through the snow, braved the splutter of guns and gleam of torches, were holes now for birds to rest in. Tangled creepers had spread to the very summit of the walls. In the keep, instead of the grim men in armour, there was a wooden board with a record of the castle and instructions on the subject of refreshments. Only at

night, when the cold moon blanched everything, the castle stood like the grim ghost of its old self, high above the silver trickle of the Talfer.

After a long morning's sitting the girls had started forth with Harz and Dawney to spend the afternoon at this old ruin; Miss Naylor, kept at home by headache, watched them depart with many words of caution against sunstroke, stinging nettles, and strange dogs.

Since the painter's return Christian and he had hardly spoken to each other. They sat now together on a battlement. Below in a railed gallery with little tables, two soldiers were drinking beer and playing a game which necessitated ceaseless changing of their seats; and at the top of a flight of stairs the Custodian's wife was singing, and sewing at a garment. Suddenly Christian said: "I thought that we were friends."

"Well, Fräulein Christian," Harz replied ironically, "are we not?"

"You went away without a word; a friend does n't do that."

Harz bit his lips.

"I don't think you care," she went on with a sort of desperate haste, "whether you hurt people or not. You have been here all this time without even going to see your father and mother."

"Do you think they would want to see me?"

Christian looked up.

"It 's all been soft for you," he said bitterly; "you don't understand."

He turned his head away, and then burst out: "I 'm proud to come straight from the soil—I would n't have it different; but they are the people, everything 's narrow with them—they only understand what they can see and touch."

"I 'm sorry I spoke like that," said Christian softly; "do tell me of yourself."

There was something just a little cruel in the way the painter looked at her, then seeming to feel compunction, he said quickly: "I always hated peasant life—I wanted to get away. I wanted to get into the world; I had a feeling in here—so strong—*you* can't tell! I wanted—I don't know what I

wanted! I ran away at last to a house-painter at Meran. The priest wrote me a letter from my father—they threw me off; that's all."

Christian's eyes were very bright, her lips moved a little, like the lips of a child listening to a story.

"Go on," she said.

"I stayed at Meran two years, till I'd learnt all that I could there, then a brother of my mother's helped me to get to Vienna; I was lucky enough to find work there with a man whose business was to decorate churches. We went about the country together, he and I. Once when he was ill I painted the roof of a church entirely by myself; I lay on my back on the scaffold boards all day for a week—I was proud of that roof." He paused.

"But when did you begin painting pictures?"

"A friend asked me why I did n't try for the Académie? So I went to the night schools; I worked every minute—I had to get my bread, you see, as well, and so I worked at night. Then came the examina-

tion; I thought I could do nothing—it was just as if I had never had a brush or pencil in my hand. But the second day a professor in passing me said, 'Good! Very good!' That gave me courage. When it was over I was sure that I had failed; but I was second out of sixty."

Christian nodded.

"To work in the schools I had to give up my business. There was only one teacher who taught me anything; the others seemed to me all fools. This man would come and rub out what you'd done with his sleeve. I used to cry with rage—but I told him I could learn only from him, and he was so astonished that he got me into his class."

"But how did you live," asked Christian, "if you had n't money?"

He looked at her, and his face burned with a dark flush. "I don't know how I lived," he said; "you must have been through these things yourself to know, you would never understand."

"But I want to—I would give anything to understand."

"What do you want me to tell you?" he asked harshly; "how I went twice a week to eat free dinners! How I took charity! How I was hungry! What does it mean to you if I say it a hundred times? There was a rich cousin of my mother's—I used to go to him. Do you think I liked it? But if you have n't bread—and in the winter——"

Christian put out her hand.

"I would borrow apronsful of coals from other students who were poor like me—to the rich students I never went."

His face had whitened.

"It makes one hate the world! You work until you stagger; you 're cold and hungry; you see the rich people in their carriages, wrapped in furs, and all the time you want to do something great. You pray for a chance, any chance; nothing comes to the poor! Ah! it makes you hate the world."

Christian's eyes had filled with tears. He went on:

"I was n't the only one in that condition; we used to meet and talk. Garin, a Russian with a brown beard and patches of cheek

showing through, and yellow teeth—he always looked so hungry. Paunitz; he was rich—he came from sympathy! He had fat cheeks and little eyes, and a big gold chain—the swine. And there was little Misek; we met in his room, with the paper peeling off the walls, and two doors with cracks in them, so that there always was a draught. We used to sit on his bed, and pull the dirty blankets over us for warmth; and smoke—tobacco was the last thing that we went without. Over the bed was a Virgin and a Child—Misek was a very devout Catholic; but one day when he had no dinner and a dealer had kept his picture without paying him, he took the image and threw it on the floor before our eyes; it broke, and he trampled on the bits. Lendorf was another, a heavy fellow who was always puffing out his white cheeks and smiting himself, and saying: '*Die verfluchte Gesellschaft!*' And Schönborn, an aristocrat who 'd quarrelled with his family. He was the poorest of us all; but only he and I would ever have done anything—they all knew that!"

Christian listened with awe: "Do you mean?" she said, "do you mean, that you——?"

"You see!" he said; "you 're afraid of me at once. It 's not possible even for you to understand. It only makes you afraid. A man who has lived hungry, on charity, sick with rage and shame, is a wolf even to *you!*"

Christian looked straight into his eyes.

"That 's not true."

There was a silence.

"If I can't understand, I can feel. Would you feel the same now if it were to come again?"

"Yes, it drives me mad even now to think of people fatted with prosperity, sneering and holding up their hands at poor devils who have suffered ten times more than the most those soft animals could bear. I 'm older; I 've lived—I know things cannot be put right by violence—nothing will put things right, but that does n't stop my feeling."

Christian put her hand on his arm.

"Did you do anything?" she asked. "You must tell me all now."

"We talked—we were always talking."

"No," said Christian. "Tell me everything!"

Unconsciously she claimed, and he seemed unconsciously to admit her right to knowledge.

"There 's not much to tell. One day we began talking in low voices—Garin began it; he had been in some affair in Russia. There were vows made; after that we never raised our voices. We had a plan. It was all new to me, and I hated the whole thing—but I was always hungry, or sick from taking charity, and I would have done anything. They knew that; they used to look at me and Schönborn; we knew that no one else had any courage. He and I were great friends, but we never talked of *that;* we tried to look away from it. If we had a good day and were not so hungry, it seemed so heavy; but when the day had not been good —then it seemed light enough. I was n't afraid, but I used to wake up in the night; I hated those oaths, I hated every one of th

fellows; the thing was not what I was made for, it was n't my work, it was n't nature, it was forced on me—I hated it, but sometimes I was like a madman."

"Yes, yes," she murmured.

"All the time I worked at the Académie; I learned all I could. . . . One evening we met—Paunitz was not there. There was just one tallow candle, I remember; Misek was telling us how the thing had been arranged. Schönborn had been drinking. He and I looked at each other—it was warm—perhaps we were not hungry—it was springtime, too, and in the Spring it 's different. There is something——"

Christian nodded.

"While we were talking," he went on, "there came a knock at the door. Lendorf put his eye to the keyhole, and made a sign to us. It was the police. Nobody said anything. Then Misek crawled under the bed, and we followed, and the knocking was louder all the time. In the wall at the back of the bed there was a little door into an empty cellar. We crept through. There was

a trap-door behind some cases, where they used to roll the barrels in. Misek opened it, and we crawled through that into the back street. We went different ways."

He paused, and Christian gasped.

"I thought I would get my money, but there was a policeman before my door. They had us finely. It was Paunitz, and if I were to meet him now, I 'd wring his neck. I swore I would not be caught, but I could n't tell where to go. Then I thought of a little Italian barber that used to shave me whenever I had money, and I knew that he would help. He belonged to an Italian Society, and he often talked to me, under his breath, of course. I went to him. He was shaving himself before going to a ball. I told him what had happened; and he put his back against the outside door. I asked him to give me a wig. He had wigs, having to do with actors. He was very frightened, he understood this sort of thing better than I did—I was only twenty then. He made me sit down, and shaved my head and my moustache, and put a fair wig on my head.

Then he went to his kitchen, and brought me macaroni, and a little piece of meat, and told me to eat. He gave me a big fair moustache, and a cap, and hid the moustache in the lining of the cap. He brought me a cloak of his own, too, and four *gulden.* All the time he was very frightened, and kept listening, and saying: 'Eat!'

"When I had done, he said: 'Now go away, I refuse to know you any more!'

"I thanked him and went out. All that night I walked about; I could n't think of anything to do or anywhere to go. In the morning I slept on a seat in one of the squares. I thought I would go to the *Gallerien;* I went, and spent the whole day there looking at the pictures. When the Galleries were shut I walked out. I was very tired, so I went into a *café,* and had some beer. When I came out I sat on the same seat in the Square. I meant to wait till dark and then walk out of the city and take the train at some little station. I was very wretched. While I was sitting on the seat I went to sleep. A police-

man woke me. In his hand he had my wig.

"'Why do you wear a wig?' he said.

"I answered: 'Because I am bald, of course!'

"'No,' he said, 'you are not bald, you have been shaved. I can feel the hair coming.'

"He put his finger on my head. I felt quite reckless and I laughed.

"He said, 'You will come with me and explain all this; your nose and eyes are looked for.'

"I said nothing, and went with him quietly. He took me to the police station." . . .

Harz seemed carried away by his own story. His quick dark face worked with his emotion, and his steel-grey eyes stared as though he were passing again through all that he was telling her.

The hot sun struck down, and Christian drew herself together, sitting with her hands clasped round her knees.

CHAPTER X

HARZ'S STORY

"HE took me to the police station; I did n't care then what came of it. I did n't even think of what I was to say. He led me down a passage to a room with bars across the windows and long seats, and on the walls long lists of trains, and maps. He said nothing; we sat and waited. He kept his eyes on me all the time; I felt like a caged rat. I saw no hope, so I sat and read the trains. Presently the Inspector came. 'Bring him in here,' he said; and I remember feeling that I could kill him for ordering me about! We went into the next room. It had a large clock, a writing-table, and a window, without bars, looking on a courtyard. From some pegs were hanging long policeman's coats and caps. He told me to take off my cap, and show my wig. I took it off,

wig and all, and laughed. The Inspector asked me who I was. I refused to answer. Just then there was a loud sound of voices in the room where we had come from. The Inspector told the policeman to look after me, and went into the other room. I could hear them talking. Then the Inspector called: 'Come here, Becker!' I stood very quiet, and Becker went towards the door. I heard the Inspector say: 'Go and look for Schwartz, I will see after this fellow.' The policeman went, and the Inspector stood with his back to me in the half-open door, and began again to talk to the man in the other room. Once or twice he looked round at me, but I stood quiet all the time. Then they began to disagree, and their voices got angry. The Inspector moved a little towards the other room. I thought 'Now!' and slipped off my cloak. I took a policeman's coat and cap softly, and put them on. My heart beat till I felt sick. I went on tiptoe to the window. There was no one outside, but at the entrance a man was holding horses. I opened the window a little. I held my

breath. I heard the Inspector say quite loud: 'I will report you for impertinence!' I slipped through the window. The coat came down nearly to my heels, and the cap over my eyes. I walked past the man with the horses, and said: 'Good-evening' to him. One of the horses had begun to kick, and so he only grunted. I got into a passing tram; it was five minutes to the West Bahnhof; I got out there. There was a train starting; they were shouting '*Einsteigen!*' and I ran. The collector tried to stop me. I shouted: 'Important, important!' He let me by. I jumped into a carriage. The train moved on."

He paused, and Christian heaved a sigh.

Presently Harz went on again, twisting a twig of ivy in his hands: "There was another man there in the carriage reading a paper. I began to think. Presently I said to him, 'Can you tell me where we shall stop first?' He said: 'St. Polten.' Then I knew it was the Munich express that I was in—only St. Polten, Amstetten, Linz, and Salzburg—four stops before the frontier. The man

put down his paper and looked at me; he had a big fair moustache and rather shabby clothes. It disturbed me, his looking at me; I thought every minute he would say: 'Why, you 're not a policeman!' Suddenly it came into my mind: 'If they look for me in this train, it will be as a policeman!'—they would know at the station that a policeman had run past at the last minute. I wanted to get rid of the coat and cap, but the man was there, and I did not like to move out of the carriage for other people to notice me. So I sat still. We came to St. Polten. The man in my carriage took his bag, got out, and left his paper on the seat. We started again; then I breathed, and as soon as we had gone a minute I took the cap and coat and threw them out into the darkness. I thought: 'I 'll get across the frontier now.' I took my own cap out and found the moustache Luigi gave me. I rubbed my clothes as clean as possible; I stuck on the moustache; with some little ends of chalk I had in my pocket I made my eyebrows light, and drew some lines in my face to make it older, and

I pulled my cap well down above my wig. Oh! I did that well—I was like the man who had just got out. I sat in the corner where he had sat, and took up his newspaper, but I did n't read—I waited for Amstetten. It seemed very long before we got there. I looked out of the window—five or six policemen stood on the platform, one quite close. I sat behind my paper. A policeman opened the door and looked round—I looked at him; he walked through the carriage into the corridor. I took some tobacco and rolled up a cigarette, but it shook—like this," and he lifted the ivy twig that trembled in his fingers. "After a minute the conductor and two policemen came. The conductor said: 'He was here, with this gentleman.' One of them looked at me, and said: 'Have you seen a policeman travelling on this train?" 'Yes,' I said. He asked: 'Where?' I said: 'Here; he got out at St. Polten.' The policeman said to the conductor: 'Did you see him get out there?' The conductor answered: 'No.' I said: 'He got out as the train was moving.' The policeman said: 'Ah! What

was he like?' I said: 'Rather short—and no moustache. Why?' The first policeman said: 'Did you notice anything unusual?' I said: 'No; only that he wore coloured trousers. What 's the matter?' One policeman said to the other: 'That is our man! Send a telegram to St. Polten; he has more than an hour's start.' He asked me where I was going. I said: 'To Linz.' 'Ah!' he said, 'you will have to give evidence; your name and address please?' I told him 'Josef Reinhardt, 17 Donau Strasse.' He wrote it down. The conductor said: 'We are late, can we start?' They shut the door. I heard them say to the conductor: 'Search again at Linz, and report to the Inspector there.' They hurried on to the platform, and we started. At first I thought I would get out as soon as the train had left the station. Then, that I should be too far from the frontier; better to go on to Linz and take my chance there. I sat still and tried not to think. After a long, long time, we began to run slowly. I put my head out and could see in the distance a great ring

of lights, rather high, hanging in the blackness. I loosened the carriage door and waited for the train to run still slower; I did not mean to go into Linz like a rat into a trap. At last I could wait no longer; I opened the door and jumped. I fell into some bushes. I was not much hurt, only bruised, with the breath knocked out of me. When I was able, I crawled out. It was very dark. I felt heavy, and for some time I went stumbling in and out amongst the trees. Presently I came to a clear space; on one side I could see the town's shape drawn in lighted lamps, and on the other a dark mass, which I think was forest; in the distance too was a thin chain of lights. I thought: 'They must be the lights upon a bridge.' Just then the moon came out, and I could see the river shining down below. It was cold and damp, and I walked quickly. At last I came out on a road, past houses and barking dogs, down to the river bank; there I sat against a shed and went to sleep. I woke very stiff. It was darker than before; the moon was gone. I could just see the

river. I stumbled on, to get through the town before the dawn. It was all black shapes—houses and sheds, and the smell of the river, the smell of rotting hay, apples, tar, mud, fish; and here and there on the wharf there was a lantern. I stumbled over casks and ropes and boxes; I saw I should not get clear—the dawn had begun already over on the other side. Some men came from a house behind me. I bent, and crept behind some barrels. They passed along the wharf; they seemed to drop into the river. I heard one of them say: 'Passau before night.' I stood upright and saw they had walked on board a steamer which was lying head up-stream, with some barges in tow. There was a plank laid to the steamer, and a lantern at the other end. I could hear the fellows moving below deck, getting up the steam. I ran across the plank and crept to the end of the steamer. I meant to go with them to Passau! The rope which towed the barges was nearly taut; I knew if I could get on to the barges I should be safe. I climbed down on this

rope and crawled along. I was desperate, because I knew they would soon come up, and it was getting light. I thought I should fall into the water many times, but I got to the barge at last. It was laden with straw. There was nobody on board. I was hungry and thirsty—I looked for something to eat; but there was nothing, only the ashes of a fire and a man's coat. I crept into the straw. Soon a boat brought some men, one for each barge, then there were sounds of steam; we moved through the water. I fell asleep. When I woke we were creeping through a heavy mist. I made a little hole in the straw and saw the bargeman. He was sitting by a fire at the barge's edge, so that the sparks and smoke blew away over the water. He ate and drank with both hands, and he looked funny in the mist, like a big bird flapping its wings; there was a good smell of coffee too. I sneezed; it was funny to see how the fellow looked about! Presently he took a pitch-fork and prodded in the straw. Then I stood up. I could not help laughing, he was so

surprised—a great man, dark, with a black beard. I pointed to the fire and said: 'Give me some!' He pulled me out of the straw with his big hands; I was so stiff, you see. I sat by the fire, and ate black bread and turnips, and drank coffee; he stood by, watching me and muttering. I could n't understand well what he said—it was a dialect from Hungary. He asked me: How I got there—who I was—where I was from? I looked him in the face, and he looked down at me, sucking his pipe. He was a big man, he lived alone on the river, and I was tired of telling lies, so I told him everything. When I had done he grunted. I remember him standing over me, with the mist hanging in his beard, and his great arms naked. He drew me water, and I washed and showed him my wig and my moustache, and threw them overboard—I was tired of them. All that day we lay out on the barge in the mist, with our feet out to the fire, smoking; now and then he would spit into the ashes and mutter something into his beard. I remember that day well. The steamer was like

a monster with fiery nostrils, and the other barges were dumb creatures with eyes, where the fires were lighted; we could n't see the bank, but now and then a bluff and high trees, or a castle, showed in the mist. If I had only had paint and canvas that day!" He sighed.

"It was early Spring, and the river was in flood; they were going to Regensburg to unload there, take fresh cargo, and back to Linz. Later, the mist began to clear. The bargeman hid me in the straw. At Passau was the frontier; they were to lie there for the night. When it was dark, there were whistles, and we stopped, but nothing happened, and I slept in the straw. The next day I lay out on the barge deck; it was bright, but I was free—the sun shone gold on the straw and the green sacking; the water seemed to dance, and I laughed—I laughed all the time, and the bargeman laughed with me. He was a fine fellow! At Regensburg I helped them to unload; for more than a week we worked; they called me baldhead. When it was all over I gave the money I

got for the unloading to the big bargeman; we kissed each other when we parted. I had still three of the *gulden* that Luigi gave me, and I went to a house-painter and got work with him. For six months I stayed there to save money; then I wrote to my mother's cousin in Vienna, and told him I was going to London. He gave me an introduction to some friends there. I went to Hamburg, and then to London in a cargo steamer, and I have been there ever since—I 've never been back till now."

CHAPTER XI

A SUMMER STORM

AFTER a minute's silence Christian said in a startled voice: "They could arrest you then!"

Harz laughed.

"If they knew; but it 's seven years ago."

"Why did you come here, when it 's so dangerous?"

"I had been working too hard—I wanted to see my country. After seven years and when it 's forbidden! I 'm ready to go back now." He looked down at her, frowning.

"Had you a hard time in London, too?" Christian asked.

"At first—harder—I could n't speak the language. In my profession it 's hard work to get recognised, and it 's hard work to make a living. There are too many whose interest

it is to keep you down—I shan't forget them."

"But every one is not like that?"

"No; there are fine fellows, too. I shan't forget them either. I can sell my pictures now; I 'm no longer weak, and I promise you I shan't forget. If in the future I have power, and I shall have power—I shan't forget." He clenched his hands.

"Oh!" said Christian, "*you* are beyond that! That 's for smaller men."

A shower of fine gravel came rattling sharply on the wall. In the courtyard Dawney was standing with an amused expression on his upturned face.

"Are you going to stay there all night?" he asked. "Greta and I have bored each other."

"We 're coming," called Christian hastily.

On the way back neither spoke a word. When they reached the Villa, Harz took her hand, and said: "Fräulein Christian, I can't do any more with your picture. I shan't touch it again after this."

She made no answer, but they looked at

each other, and both seemed to ask, to entreat, something more; then her eyes fell. He dropped her hand, and saying, "Good-night," ran after Dawney.

In the corridor, Dominique, carrying a dish of fruit, met the sisters; he informed them that Miss Naylor had retired to bed; that Herr Paul would not be home to dinner; his master was dining in his room; dinner would be served for Mrs. Decie and the two young ladies in a quarter of an hour: "And the fish is good to-night; little trouts! try them, *Signorina mia!*" He moved on quickly, softly, like a cat, the tails of his dress-coat flapping, the heels of white socks gleaming at the end of his black figure.

Christian ran up-stairs; thoughts chased each other in her mind, like clouds across a stormy sky. She flew about her room, feeling that if she once stood still her thoughts would crystallise in one hard painful thought, which motion kept away. She washed, changed her dress and shoes, and ran down to her uncle's room. Mr. Treffry had just finished dinner; he had pushed the little

table back, and was sitting in his chair, with his glasses on his nose, reading the *Times*. Christian, standing behind him, touched his forehead with her lips.

"Glad to see you, Chris. Your stepfather's out to dinner, and I can't stand your aunt when she 's in one of her talking moods —bit of a humbug, Chris, between ourselves, eh, now, is n't she?" His old eyes twinkled.

Christian smiled, touching his hair lightly with her fingers. There was a curious happy restlessness in her that would not let her keep quite still.

"Picture finished?" Mr. Treffry asked suddenly, taking up his paper with a crackle: "Don't go and fall in love with the painter, Chris."

Christian turned pale to the lips.

"Why not?" she thought. "What should *you* know about him? Is n't he good enough for me?" She turned away abruptly. A gong sounded.

"There 's your dinner," Mr. Treffry remarked.

"Good-night, Uncle!" With sudden contrite tenderness she bent and kissed him.

When she had left the room Mr. Treffry, putting down the *Times*, stared at the door, humming to himself, and thoughtfully fingering his chin.

Christian could not eat; she sat pale and silent, playing with her knife and fork, indifferent to the hoverings of Dominique, tormented by uneasy fears and longings. She answered Mrs. Decie at random. Greta, who sat opposite, kept stealing looks at her from underneath her lashes.

"Decided characters are charming, don't you think so, Christian?" Mrs. Decie said, thrusting her chin a little forward, and modelling the words with her pale lips. "That is why I like Mr. Harz so much; such an immense advantage for a man to know his mind. You have only to look at that young man to see that he knows what he wants, and means to have it."

Christian pushed her plate away, dropping her hands into her lap. Greta, flushing, said abruptly: "Doctor Edmund is not a decided

character, I think. This afternoon he said: 'Shall I have some beer—yes, I shall—no, I shall not;' then he ordered the beer, so, when it came, he gave it to the soldiers."

Mrs. Decie moved her fan, turning her enigmatic smile from one girl to the other.

When dinner was over they went into her room. Greta stole to the piano, where her long hair fell almost to the keys; silently she sat there fingering the notes, smiling to herself, and looking at her aunt, who, with her knees crossed, was reading Pater's essays. Christian too had taken up a book, but put it down again—of several pages she had not understood a word. Presently she went into the garden, wandering about the lawn, clasping her hands behind her head. The air was heavy; thunder trembled far away among the mountains, flashes of summer lightning played behind the trees; and two great moths were hovering about a rosebush. Christian watched their soft uncertain rushes. Going to the little summer-house she flung herself down on a seat, and pressed her hands above her heart.

There was a strange and sudden aching in that heart: was he going from her? If so, what would there be left? How little and how narrow seemed the outlook of her life—with a great world waiting for her, a world of beauty, effort, self-sacrifice, fidelity! It was as though a flash of that summer lightning had fled by, singeing her, taking from her all her powers of flight, burning off her wings, as of one of those pale hovering moths. Tears started up, and trickled slowly down her face. "Blind!" she thought; "how could I have been so blind?"

Someone was coming down the path. A gleam of lightning lit up everything.

"Who 's there?" she cried.

Harz stood in the doorway.

"Why did you come out?" he said. "I did n't mean to see you—Ah! why did you come out? You 've been crying? Tell me!" His hand descended on her hand; Christian tried to draw it from him, and to turn her eyes away, but she could not. He flung himself down on his knees, and cried: "I love you!"

In a sort of rapture of soft terror Christian caught his hand and bent her forehead to it.

"What are you doing?" she heard him say. "Is it possible that *you* love me?" and suddenly she felt his kisses on her hair. She heard his voice:

"My sweet! it will be so hard for you; you are so little, so little, and so weak;" and clasping his hand closer, closer to her face, she murmured: "I don't care."

There was a silence, a soft long silence, that seemed to last for ever. Suddenly she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Whatever comes!" she whispered, and gathering her dress, she escaped from him into the darkness.

Harz stood breathless, listening for her footsteps on the grass.

CHAPTER XII

HERR PAUL UPSET

CHRISTIAN woke next morning with a smile. At breakfast she kept her head bent down above her plate, but in her attitudes, her voice, her eyes, there was a happy and sweet seriousness, as if she were hugging close to her some holy thought. After breakfast she took a book and sat in the open window, whence she could see the poplars at the entrance. There was a breeze; the budding roses on a tree close by kept nodding; cathedral bells were in full chime; and the bees hummed above the lavender; soft clouds were floating in the sky like huge, white birds.

Inside the room Miss Naylor in staccato tones was reading French dictation, while Greta took it down, one eye on her paper, one eye on Scruff, who lay with a black ear

flapped across his paw, and his tan eyebrows quivering. He was in disgrace, for Dominique, coming on him unawares, had seen him "say his prayers" before a pudding, and afterwards, since no one gave it him, take it for himself.

Christian's lips parted; she put her book down gently, and walked bareheaded out on to the path. Harz was coming from the entrance. Her fingers touched his, and she gave him a long look, "I am all yours!" she whispered. His fingers closed on hers tightly, and he went on into the house.

Christian slipped back, sat down again, took up her book, and waited. It seemed a long while before he came out, but when he did he waved her back, and hurried on; she had a glimpse of his face, white to the lips. She leaned against the wall, feeling faint and sick, then flew to her stepfather's room.

Herr Paul was standing in a corner with the utterly disturbed appearance of an easy-going man, on whom the unexpected has descended. His fine shirt-front was crumpled

as if his breast had heaved too suddenly under strong emotion; his smoked eye-glasses dangled down his back; his fingers were embedded in his beard. He was fixing his eye on a certain portion of the floor as though expecting something to explode and blow them all to fragments. In an arm-chair Mrs. Decie, with half-closed eyes, was running her finger tips across her brow.

Christian went up to them. "What have you said to him?" she cried.

Herr Paul regarded her with glassy eyes.

"What? *Mein Gott!* Here—your aunt and I?"

"What have you said to him?" repeated Christian.

"Said? The impudence! An anarchist! A beggar?"

Mrs. Decie murmured, "Paul!"

"You—you—" Christian cried between her teeth.

"*Hein!* You are a disgrace! The fellow!" He began to stride about the room, muttering: "The anarchist—the impudent outlaw!"

The girl was quivering from head to foot.

"How dared you?" And covering her eyes, she ran out of the room, passing Miss Naylor and Greta, blanched and frightened in the doorway. Upstairs she locked her door; flinging herself down on her bed, she broke into a storm of sobbing. . . .

Herr Paul had stopped short in his tramp; still with his eyes fixed on the floor, he growled:

"*Schön!* A fine thing—*hein?* And what is coming? Will you please to tell me? An anarchist—a beggar!"

"Paul!" murmured Mrs. Decie.

"Paul! Paul! And you—and you!" pointing to Miss Naylor—"Two women with eyes!—with eyes!—" He threw himself into a chair.

"There is nothing to be gained by violence," Mrs. Decie said, passing her handkerchief across her lips. Miss Naylor, whose thin brown cheeks had flushed, said with nervous dignity:

"I hope you do not—I am sure there was nothing that I could have prevented—I should be glad if that were understood."

And with the glow of this assertion of herself running down into her toes, the little lady went away, and closed the door behind her.

"You hear!" Herr Paul said, violently sarcastic: "nothing she could have prevented! Nothing—*Enfin!* Will you please tell me what I am to do?"

"Men of the world"—whose philosophy is a thing of circumstance and things accepted—find any deviation from the path of their convictions a dangerous, a shocking thing; also an intolerable bore. Herr Paul had spent his life in laughing at convictions; the matter had but to touch him personally, and the tap of laughter was turned off, the tap of anger overflowed. That any one to whom he was the lawful guardian should marry other than a well-groomed man, properly endowed with goods, properly selected, was beyond expression horrid. From his point of view he had great excuse for horror; nor could he know whether he had excuse for horror from other points of view. His amazement had in it a spice of the pathetic;

he was like a child in the presence of a thing that he absolutely could not understand. The interview had left him with a sense of insecurity which he felt to be unfair. He sighed.

The door was once more opened, and Greta flew in this time, her cheeks all flushed, her hair floating out behind her, and tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Papa!" she cried, "you have been cruel to Chris. The door is locked; I can hear her crying—why have you been cruel to her?" and without waiting to be answered, she flew out again.

Herr Paul seized his hair with both his hands: "Good! Very good! My own child, you see! What next then, please?"

Mrs. Decie rose from her chair languidly: "My head is very bad," she said. She went across to Paul and stood beside him, shading her eyes and speaking in low tones:

"It is no use making a fuss—nothing can come of this—he has not a penny. Christian will have nothing till you die, which will not

be for a long time yet, if you can but avoid an apoplectic fit!"

At these last words Herr Paul gave a start of obvious disgust; "Hum!" he muttered; it was as if the world were bent on showing him brutality. Mrs. Decie fixed her pale eyes on him.

"Besides, if I know anything of this young man, he will not come here again, after the words that you have spoken. As for Christian—you had better talk to Nicholas. I am going to lie down."

Herr Paul, nervously fingering the shirt-collar round his stout, short neck, repeated:

"Nicholas! Certainly, Nicholas—a good idea—*ah! mais quelle diable d'affaire!*"

"French!" thought Mrs. Decie as she left the room; "we shall soon have peace. Poor Christian! I 'm very sorry—but, after all, these things are an affair of time and opportunity." And this consoled her a good deal.

But for Christian the hours were passing in one long nightmare of grief and shame, of fear and anger. Would he forgive? Would he be true to her? Or would he go away

without a word? Since yesterday it was as if she had stepped into another world, and had lost that world again. In place of that new feeling, intoxicating as wine, what was coming? What dreadful, bitter ending? The ending of a dozen words brutal as flung stones. A rude entrance into life, a life of facts, and primitive emotions.

After a time she rose and let Greta in, for the child had begun sobbing; but she would not talk to her, and sat hour after hour at the window with the air fanning her hot face, and the pain in her eyes turned to the sky and trees. Greta after one or two attempts at consolation, sank on the floor, and remained there, humbly gazing at her sister in a silence that was only broken by Christian clearing her throat of tears, and the song of birds out in the garden. In the afternoon Greta slipped away and did not come back again.

Herr Paul after his interview with Nicholas Treffry had taken a bath, and perfumed himself with much precision. At luncheon he caused it to be clearly understood that, under

circumstances such as these, a man's house was not suited for a pig to live in, and shortly afterwards he had gone out to the *Kurhaus*, whence he had not returned by dinner-time.

Christian came down for dinner. In both her cheeks there were bright crimson spots, and dark circles ringed her eyes; she behaved, however, as though nothing had occurred. Miss Naylor, struggling between the kindness of her heart and the shock her system had sustained, kept her eyes fixed on the table-cloth, and rolled a number of bread pills, looking at each one as it came, with an air of pained surprise, and concealing it with difficulty. Mr. Treffry was coughing, and when he talked his voice seemed to rumble even more than usual. Greta was quite dumb, trying to catch Christian's eye; Mrs. Decie alone seemed at her ease. After dinner Mr. Treffry went off to his room, leaning heavily on Christian's shoulder. As he sank into his chair, he said to her:

"Come, Chris, pull yourself together! I daresay it seems hard to you, my dear,

but—," he shook his head. Christian did not answer him.

Outside the room Greta caught her by the sleeve.

"Look!" she whispered, thrusting out a piece of paper. "It is from Dr. Edmund to me, but you must read it."

Christian opened the note, which ran as follows:

"My Philosopher and Friend:

"I received your note, and went to our friend's studio; he was not in. Half an hour ago I stumbled on him in the Platz. He is not quite himself; has had a touch of the sun—but nothing serious. I took him to my hotel, where he is now in bed. If he will only stay there he will be all right in a day or two. In any case he shall not elude my clutches for the present.

"Convey my warm respects to Mistress Christian, and imagine me yours in friendship and philosophy,

"Edmund Dawney."

Christian read and re-read this note. She turned to Greta.

"What did you say to Dr. Dawney?"

Greta took back the piece of paper, and replied: "I said:

"'DEAR DR. EDMUND:

"'We are anxious about Herr Harz. We think he is perhaps not very well to-day. We (I and Christian) should like to know. You can tell us. Please shall you?

"'GRETA.'

"That is what I said."

Christian dropped her eyes. "What made you write?"

Greta gazed at her mournfully: "I thought —oh! Chris, come into the garden. I am so hot, and it is so dull without you!"

Christian bent her head forward and rubbed her cheek against Greta's cheek, then without a word she ran up-stairs and locked herself into her room. The child stood listening; when she heard the key turn in the lock, she sank down on the bottom step and took Scruff in her arms.

Half an hour later Miss Naylor, carrying a candle, found her there fast asleep, with her

head resting on the terrier's back, and tear stains on her cheeks. . . .

Mrs. Decie presently came out, also carrying a candle, and went to her brother's room. She stood before his chair, with her hands folded one upon the other.

"Nicholas," she said, "what is to be done?"

Mr. Treffry was pouring whiskey with a shaky hand into a glass.

"Damn it, Con!" he answered; "how should I know?"

"There's something in Christian that makes it dangerous to interfere. I know very well that I 've no influence at all with her." A smile drew down the corners of her lips.

"You 're right there, Con," Mr. Treffry replied.

Mrs. Decie's pale eyes, fastened on his face, seemed to force him to look up.

"I wish you would leave off drinking whiskey and attend to me. Paul is an element——"

"Paul," Mr. Treffry growled, "is an ass!"

"Paul," pursued Mrs. Decie, "is an element of danger in the situation; any ill-timed opposition of his might drive her to I don't know

what. Christian is gentle, she is 'sympathetic' as they say; but thwart her, and she is as obstinate as——"

"You or I! Leave her alone!"

"I understand her character, but I confess that I am at a loss what to do."

"Do nothing!" He drank again.

Mrs. Decie took up the candle.

"Men!" she said with a mysterious intonation, and shrugging up her shoulders, she walked out.

Mr. Treffry put down his glass.

"Understand?" he thought; "no, you don't understand, and I don't. Who understands a young girl? Vapourings, and dreams, and moonshine! . . . What does she see in this painter fellow? Eh? I wonder!" He breathed heavily. "Chris! By Heavens! I would n't have had this happen for a hundred thousand pounds!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE STUDIO ON THE WALL

FOR many hours after Dawney had taken him to his hotel, Harz was prostrate with stunning pains in head and neck. He had been all day without food, exposed to burning sun, and suffering violent emotion. Movement of any sort caused him such agony that he could only lie in stupor, counting the spots that danced before his eyes. Dawney, who kept coming in and out, did everything for him, and Harz resented in a dull listless fashion the shrewd intentness of the doctor's calm, black eyes.

Towards the end of the second day, however, he was able to get up, and Dawney found him sitting on the bed in shirt and trousers.

"My son," he said, "you had better tell me what the trouble is—it will do your stubborn carcase good."

The painter frowned: "Doctor," he said, "I must go back to work."

"Work!" said Dawney deliberately: "you could n't do it, if you tried."

"I must."

"My dear fellow, you could n't tell one colour from another."

"I must be doing something; I can't sit here and think."

Dawney hooked his thumbs into his waistcoat: "You won't see the sun for three days yet, if I can help it."

Harz got up and walked about the room.

"I 'm going to my studio to-morrow. I will promise not to go out for three whole days. But I must be where I can see my work. If I can't paint, I can draw; I can feel my brushes, and move my things about. I shall go mad if I do nothing."

Dawney took his arm, and together they walked up and down.

"If I let you go," he said, "you 'll promise to stay in? Give me a chance! It 's as much to me to put you straight as it is to you to paint a decent picture. Now go to

bed; I 'll have a carriage for you to-morrow morning."

Harz sat down on the bed again, and for a long time stayed there without moving, his eyes fixed on the floor. The sight of him sitting there so desperate and miserable hurt the young doctor.

"Can you get to bed by yourself?" he said at last.

Harz nodded.

"Well, then, good-night, old chap!" and Dawney left the room.

He took his hat and turned his steps toward the Villa. Between the poplars, there, he stopped to think. The farther trees were fretworked black against the pale gold of sunset; a huge moth, attracted by the tip of his cigar, came fluttering in his face. From the stables the music of a concertina rose and fell. He threw down his cigar, and with his hands deep-buried in his pockets, stood for some minutes staring at the house. Then he went up to the door.

He was shown to Mrs. Decie's room. She was holding a magazine before her eyes, and

received him with as much relief as her philosophy permitted.

"You are the very person that I wish to see," she said.

He noticed that the magazine she held was still uncut.

Mrs. Decie leaned towards him.

"You are a young man," she said, "but as my doctor I have a right to your discretion."

Dawney smiled; in his broad clean-shaven face his features looked absurdly small; his eyes held their look of calculation.

"That is so," he answered bowing.

"It is about this most unfortunate affair. I understand that Mr. Harz is with you. I want you to use your influence to dissuade him from attempting to see my niece."

"Influence!" said Dawney; "you know Harz!"

Mrs. Decie's eyes hardened.

"Everybody," she said, "has his weak points. This young man is open to attack from at least two quarters—his pride is one, his work another. I am seldom wrong in

gauging character; these are the vital spots with him, and they are of the essence of this matter. I 'm sorry for him, of course—but at his age, and living a man's life, these things —" Her smile was of an extra pallor. "I wish you could give me something for my head. It 's foolish to worry over such a thing. Nerves of course! But I can't help it! You know my opinion, Dr. Dawney. That young man will go far if he remains unfettered; he will make a name. You will be doing him a great service if you could show him the affair as it really is—a drag upon him, and quite unworthy of his pride! *Do* help me! You are just the man to do it!"

Dawney threw up his head as if to shake off this impeachment; the curve of his chin thus displayed was imposing in its fulness; altogether he was imposing, having an air of capability.

He looked at her. She struck him as really scared; it was as if her mask of smile had come awry, and failed to cover her emotion; and he was puzzled, thinking, "I would n't have believed she had it in her."

"It is not an easy business," he said aloud. "If you 'll excuse me, I 'll go and think it over."

Mrs. Decie passed her hand over her brow.

"Thank you!" she murmured, "so much! You are most kind."

As he passed the schoolroom, an impulse made him look in through the open door. Christian was sitting there, a lighted candle by her side. He caught sight of her face, and it shocked him, it was so white, so resolutely dumb. A book lay on her knees, but she was not reading; her eyes were staring straight before her with a frightened stare. He thought suddenly: "If I don't say something to her, I shall be a brute, poor thing!" Knocking, he went into the room. Christian rose.

"Miss Devorell," he said, "I 've got something for you. I 'll—I 'll write it down."

Tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, he wrote hastily the words. "You can reckon on him."

"There," he said, giving it to her.

Christian tried to speak, but her lips trembled so that she could not say a word.

"Good-night," said Dawney, and walked out. . . .

Three days later Harz was sitting in the window of his studio. Dawney had just left, having pronounced him fit to go out once more. The painter was leaning dejectedly against the wall. It was the first day he had found it possible to work, and now, tired out, he stared through the dusk at the slowly lengthening shadows of the rafters. A solitary mosquito hummed, and two house sparrows, that had built beneath the roof, chirruped sleepily and fluttered to and fro. Swallows darted by the opening of the window, dipping their blue wings towards the quiet water; a hush had stolen over everything. Harz fell asleep, with his chin drooping on his chest.

He woke startled, with a dim impression of footsteps heard, and some near presence. In the pale glimmer from innumerable stars, the room was full of twisted, shadowy shapes. He struck a match, and lit his lantern. The flame darted forth, flickered, then slowly lit up the great room.

"Who 's there?" he called.

A rustling seemed to answer. He peered about, then went to the doorway and drew the curtain. A woman's figure in a cloak standing on the stairs, shrank away against the wall. Her face was buried in her hands; the shape of her arms, from which the cloak fell back, alone was visible.

"Christian?" he said.

She dropped her hands.

"You have come to me?"

She ran past him, and when he had put the lantern down, she was standing at the window. She turned quickly, and her eyes searched his face. "Take me—take me away from here! Let me come with you!"

"Do you mean it?" Harz cried out.

"You said you would n't give me up!"

"You know what you are doing?"

She made a motion of her head: "Yes."

"You can't know what this means. Terrible things to bear, things you know nothing of—hunger perhaps! Think, even hunger! And your people won't forgive—you will lose everything."

She shook her head.

"I must choose—it 's one thing or the other. If you will take me I will be your wife."

"Ah! how I love you!"

"I can't give you up! I should be afraid!"

"But, dear; how can you come with me? We can't be married here."

"I am giving my life to you."

"You are too good for me," said Harz. "The life you 're going into—may be dark, like that!" he pointed to the window.

A sound of footsteps broke the hush. They could see the figure of a man appearing on the path below. He stopped, seemed to consider, vanished. They heard the sounds of groping hands, of a creaking door, of uncertain feet upon the stairs.

Harz seized her hand.

"Quick!" he whispered; "behind this canvas!"

Christian was trembling violently. She drew the hood of her cloak across her face. The heavy breathing and ejaculations of the visitor were plainly audible.

"He 's there, outside! Quick! Hide!"

She shook her head: "I won't."

With a thrill at his heart, Harz kissed her.

She stood, clutching her cloak close to her breast. Harz walked towards the entrance. The curtain was pulled aside.

CHAPTER XIV

HERR PAUL TAKES STEPS

IT was Herr Paul, holding a cigar in one hand, his hat in the other, and breathing rather hard. He bowed.

"Pardon!" he said huskily, "your stairs are steep, and dark! *mais enfin! nous voila!* I have ventured to come in to talk." His eyes fell on the cloaked figure in the shadow.

"Pardon! A thousand pardons! I had no idea! I beg you to forgive this indiscretion! I may take it you will resign pretensions then? You have a lady here—I have nothing more to say; I only beg a million pardons for intruding. Pardon a thousand times! Good-night!"

He bowed, and drawing his heels together, turned to go. Christian took a step forward, letting the hood fall from her head.

"It is I!" she said.

Herr Paul pirouetted.

"Good God!" he stammered, dropping his cigar and hat: "Good God!"

The lantern flared suddenly, and revealed his crimson, shaking cheeks.

"You came *here*, at night! You, the daughter of my wife!" and his eyes wandered with a dull glare round and round the room.

Harz, with a furious gesture, cried: "Take care! If you say a word against her——"

The two men, within arm's length of one another, panted, staring at each other's eyes. A minute passed, and then, without warning, the lantern flickered and went out. Christian drew the cloak round her again. Herr Paul's voice broke the silence; he had recovered self-possession.

"Ah! ah!" he said: "Darkness! *Tant mieux!* The right thing for what we have to say. Since we do not esteem each other, it is well not to see too much."

"As you will," said Harz.

Christian had come close to them. In the gloom her pale face and great shining eyes could just be seen.

Herr Paul waved his arm; the gesture was impressive and annihilating.

"This is a matter, I believe, between two men," he said, addressing Harz. "Let us come to the point. I will do you the credit to suppose that you have in view a marriage. Do you know that Miss Devorell has no money till I die?"

"Yes," answered Harz.

"And I am passably young! You have money, then?"

"No."

"In that case, you would propose to live on air?"

"I propose to work."

"That is calculated to increase your hunger! You are prepared to take Miss Devorell, a young lady accustomed to luxury, into places like—this!" he peered about him, sniffing, "into places that smell of paint, into the *milieu* of the people, into the society of Bohemians—who knows? of anarchists, perhaps?"

Harz clenched his hands: "I will answer no more questions."

"In that event, we reach the ultimatum," said Herr Paul, drawing back a step. "Listen, Herr Outlaw! If you have not left the country by noon to-morrow, you shall be introduced to the police!"

Christian uttered a cry, holding out her hands. Then for a minute in the gloom the only sound heard was the short, hard breathing of the men.

Suddenly Harz cried: "You coward, I defy you!"

"Coward!" Herr Paul repeated. "That is indeed the last word. Look to yourself, my friend!"

Stooping and fumbling on the floor, he picked up his hat. Christian had already vanished, and the sound of her hurrying footsteps was distinctly audible at the top of the dark stairs. Herr Paul stood still a minute.

"Look to yourself, my dear friend!" he said in a thick voice, groping for the wall. Planting his hat askew upon his head, he began slowly to descend the stairs.

CHAPTER XV

MR. TREFFRY PREPARES TO DRIVE

NICHOLAS TREFFRY sat reading the paper in his room by the light of a lamp with a green shade; on his sound foot the terrier Scruff was asleep and snoring lightly—the dog habitually came down when Greta was in bed, and remained till Mr. Treffry, the latest member of the household, went to rest.

The long window was open; a little river of light shone on the veranda tiles, and, flowing past them, cut the garden into two.

There was the sound of hurried footsteps, a rustling of draperies; and Christian, running through the window, stood before him.

Mr. Treffry dropped his paper. A fury of passion and alarm shone in the girl's eyes.

"Chris! What is it?"

"Hateful!"

"Chris!"

"Oh! uncle, he 's insulted, threatened! and I love him—I love his little finger more than all the world!"

Her passionate voice was trembling, her cheeks were flushed, her eyes shone, her fingers pressed her bosom.

His profound discomfort found vent in the gruff words: "Sit down!"

"I 'll never speak to father again! Oh! uncle! I love him!"

The old man, quiet in the extremity of his disturbance, leaned forward in the chair, rested his big hands on its arms, and stared at her.

Chris was gone! Here was a woman that he did not know! His lips moved under the heavy droop of his moustache. The girl's face had suddenly grown white. She sank down on her knees, and her hot cheek seemed to sear his hand. Then suddenly he felt it wet; and a lump rose in his throat. He drew his hand away, stared at it, wiped it with his sleeve, and laid it shaking on her shoulder.

"Don't cry!"

She seized and clung to it, and that clutch seemed to fill him with a sudden rage.

"What 's the matter? How the devil can I do anything if you don't tell me?"

Pressing his hand against her cheek she looked up at him. The distress of the last days, the passion and fear of the last hour, the tide of that new life of the spirit and the flesh, stirring within her, flowed out in a stream of breathless words.

Mr. Treffry exclaimed: "*Give him up to the police?* No, no!"

There was so dead a silence then that the fluttering of a moth around the lamp could be plainly heard.

Mr. Treffry cleared his throat; and raising himself heavily began to pace the room. Christian sat silent, looking up at him.

Mr. Treffry touched the bell. "Tell the groom," he said to Dominique, "to put the horses to, and have 'em round at once; bring my old boots; we drive all night."

His bent figure looked huge standing there, the body and legs outlined by light, the head and shoulders towering into shadow. For

a second a smile played on his lips and in his eyes, lurked in the deep folds of his cheeks—a gleam of deviltry. "He shall have a run for his money!" he said to himself. The gleam died out again, his eyes stared sombrely. "It 's more than he deserves—it 's more than *you* deserve, Chris. Sit down there and write to him; tell him to put himself entirely in my hands." He turned his back on her and walked into his bedroom.

Christian rose, and sat down at the writing table. She started when Dominique appeared, holding a pair of boots.

"M'mselle Chris," he whispered, "what is this?—to run about all night?" The corners of the Italian's dark moustache were curled up in a nervous grin. But Christian did not move.

'M'mselle Chris, are you ill?" Seeing her face he passed on into shadow.

Mr. Treffry soon reappeared in a long overcoat, hatted and gloved, a flask in one hand, air-cushions in the other. He threw these at his servant. "Blow them up," he said. "Look at that silly dog!" Scruff,

scenting trouble that he could not understand, was begging by himself in a corner of the room; and Dominique, blowing up the cushions, glared at him with glowing slits of eyes out of the olive moon of his distended face.

Mr. Treffry put on his boots, and walked into the passage. The carriage was before the door. He placed his foot upon the step. "Shan't want you," he called out to the groom. "Get up, Dominique."

Christian thrust an envelope into his hand. "Give him that," she said, clinging to his arm with sudden terror. "Oh, uncle, do take care!"

"Chris, if I do this for you—" They stood looking wistfully at one another. Then Mr. Treffry, shaking his head, gathered up the reins, and clambered to his seat.

"Don't fret, old girl, don't fret! Who-a, mare!"

The carriage with a jerk plunged forward into darkness, curved with a crunch of wheels; and vanished, swinging between the black tree-pillars at the entrance.

Christian stood straining to catch the failing sound of hoofs.

Down the passage came a flutter of white garments; soft limbs were twined about her, some ends of hair fell on her face.

"What is it, Chris? Where have you been? Where is Uncle Nic going? Do tell me!"

Christian tore herself away, "I don't know," she cried, "I don't know anything!"

Greta stroked her face. "Poor Chris!" she murmured. Her bare feet gleamed, her hair shone gold against her nightdress. "Come to bed, poor Chris!"

Christian laughed. "You 're like a little white moth, Greta. Feel how hot I am! You 'll burn your wings!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE DRIVE BEGINS

IN the studio, Harz, fully dressed, had lain down on his mattress. He was no longer angry and only felt that he would rather die than yield. Presently he heard footsteps coming up the stairs. He waited sullenly. Somebody was in the room. "M'sieu!"

He recognised the voice of Dominique; the man's face, illumined by a match, wore an expression of ironical disgust.

"My Master," he said, "makes you his compliments; he says there is no time to waste. You are to come and drive with him, M'sieu!"

He came close to Harz. There was a silence. Dominique struck another match.

"Your master is very kind," said Harz. "Tell him I 'm in bed."

"Ah, M'sieu," said Dominique, grimacing, "I must not go back with such an answer."

"Stay here then," cried Harz. "I will paint you in that attitude and a fine study you will make!" He broke into a laugh.

Dominique shifted from foot to foot. At last he said despairingly: "If you would not come, I was to give you this," and handed him an envelope.

Harz broke the seal and took from it a ring. He held the paper to the light.

"I 'm coming," he said suddenly.

A clock was striking as they went out through the gate close to the bridge. In the shadow of a house a carriage was drawn up, the horses pawing at the stones. From within the dark cave of the phaeton hood Mr. Treffry said gruffly: "Come along, sir!"

Harz flung his knapsack in, and followed it. His companion's figure swayed, the whip-lash slid softly along the flank of the off horse, and the carriage, swinging, rattled on across the stones. They exchanged no words, but Mr. Treffry called out, as if by afterthought: "Hallo, Dominique!" and Dominique's voice, shaken, and ironical answered faintly from behind, "*M'v 'la, M'sieu!*"

They passed down the street of silent houses, dark shapes cut clear against a strip of gleaming sky; in a *café* men sitting at little tables under a blaze of lamps turned and stared, with glasses at their lips. The narrow river of the sky spread suddenly to a vast and limpid ocean tremulous with stars. They were on the road to Italy.

The horses broke into a canter.

Mr. Treffry, leaning forward, took a pull at them at once. "Whoa, mare! Dogged does it!" and the near horse, throwing up her head, whinnied faintly; a tiny fleck of foam drifted into Harz's face.

The painter had not moved since he got in. He had come upon an impulse; because she told him to, not of his own free will; and he was angry with himself, wounded in his self-esteem, raging that he had allowed any one to render him this service. But the smooth swift movement through the velvet blackness splashed on either hand with the flying golden lamp-light; the strong sweet air blowing in his face—air that had kissed the tops of mountains and stolen half their

spirit; the snort and snuffle of the horses, the crisp rattle of their hoofs,—all this soon roused in Harz another feeling. He looked at his companion's profile, rugged and impassive, with its tufted chin; at the grey road adventuring in front into the darkness; at the purple mass of mountains piled above it. And suddenly the thought of Dominique, clinging to the rail behind as he had seen him the first day that he visited the Villa, tickled him and he began to laugh.

With a gesture, as if suddenly aware he had a neighbour, Mr. Treffry turned his head. "We shall do better than this presently," he said, "bit of a slope coming. Have n't had 'em out for three days. Whoa—mare! Steady!"

"Where are we going?" answered Harz. "Why are you taking me?"

Mr. Treffry bit his moustache: "I 'm an old chap, Mr. Harz," he said, "and an old chap may do a stupid thing once in a while!"

"You are very good," said Harz, "but I want no favour from you or any one."

Mr. Treffry stared at him.

"I like you the better for that," he said, "but you see there 's my niece to be thought of. Look here! Mr. Harz, we 're not at the frontier yet, not by fifty miles; it 's long odds we don't get there—now, don't spoil sport!" Shifting the reins into his whip hand he pointed to the left.

Harz caught the glint of steel, a glint that ran alongside, gleaming then failing in the darkness. The sigh of telegraph wires fluttered over them; the road, curving, crossed the line.

"I hear 'em," Mr. Treffry remarked; "but if we get away up the mountains, we 'll do yet!" They had begun to rise, and the horses dropped into a slower trot. Mr. Treffry, rummaging in his pocket, produced a flask.

"Not bad stuff, Mr. Harz—try it. You won't?" He tilted his head, coughed, and sucked in his moustache. "Mother's milk!" he said. They kept rising. Below them the valley was lit by webs of milky mist like the glimmer of dew on grass.

These two men sitting side by side—so unlike in face, age, stature, thought, and life

—felt drawn towards each other, as if, in the rolling of the wheels, the snorting of the horses, the huge dark space, the huge uncertainty, they had found something they could both enjoy in common. They kept looking in each other's faces in the gloom. The hill had ended and the horses stopped, panting a little; the steam from their flanks and nostrils rose into the darkness with an odour as of glue.

"We 'll let 'em get their winds. You smoke, Mr. Harz?"

Harz took the proffered weed, and lighted it from the glowing tip of Mr. Treffry's cigar. They soon started down the slope again, Mr. Treffry leaning forward, his face and hat like some giant mushroom. The wheels jolted suddenly on a rubble of loose stones; the carriage was swung sideways. The scared horses strained asunder, then leaped forward, and gathering speed, sped downwards, in the darkness.

They flew past rocks, trees, dwellings, past a lighted house that gleamed and vanished. With a clink and clatter, a flirt of dust and

pebbles, and the side lamps throwing out a frisky orange blink, the carriage dashed on down. The world seemed to rock and sway; forms danced up, to be flung flat again; under the men the seats seemed to sink and rise like boats that breast a billow. Only the stars stood still.

Mr. Treffry, putting on the brake with all his might, muttered apologetically: "A little out o' hand!"

Suddenly they made a headlong dive; the carriage swayed as if it would fly in pieces, slithered along, and with a jerk steadied itself once more. Harz lifted his voice in a shout of pure excitement. Beside him Mr. Treffry let out a short shaky howl, and from behind there rose a wail. But the hill was over and the startled horses were cantering with a free smooth motion. Mr. Treffry and Harz looked at each other sidelong.

CHAPTER XVII

FINISH OF THE DRIVE

MR. TREFFRY said with a sort of laugh: "A near go, eh? You drive? No? That 's a pity! Broken most of my bones at the game—nothing like it!" He was silent; and both seemed to wait for the other to begin; that shout had brought them close together and each felt now a kind of admiration for the other that he had not felt before. Mr. Treffry began to hum, and suddenly broke into words: "Can't make you out!" he said: "My niece is such a slip of a young thing, with all a young girl's notions! What have you got to give her, eh? Yourself? That's surely not enough; for mind you this—six months after marriage we turn out much the same, one as another—a selfish lot! Not to mention all this anarchist affair—you 're not of her blood, Mr. Harz,

nor of her way of life, nor anything—it 's taking chances—and—" his big hand groped about, and came down on the young man's knee, "I 'm fond of her, d 'you see—I 'm fond of her."

Harz was silent, staring at the horses' manes.

"If you were in my place," he said at last, "would *you* give her up?"

Mr. Treffry groaned. "Lord knows!" he muttered.

Harz went on: "Men have made themselves before now. For those who don't believe in failure, there 's no such thing. Suppose she does suffer a little? Will it do her any harm? Fair weather love 's no good."

Mr. Treffry sighed.

"Brave words, sir!" He was seized by a sudden fit of coughing. "Brave words! but you 'll pardon me if I 'm too old to understand 'em when they 're used about my niece."

He pulled the horses up, and peered into the darkness. "We 're going through this bit as quiet as we know how; if they lose

track of us here so much the better. Dominique!" The Luganese appeared beside them. "Put out the lamps. Soho, my beauties!" The horses began pacing forward at a walk. The muffled beat of their hoofs in the dust hardly broke the hush. Mr. Treffry pointed to the left: "It 'll be forty miles from here on to the frontier, over the Rolle Pass."

They began to pass some whitewashed houses; a frog was croaking loudly in a little runlet by the roadside; there was a faint and spicy whiff of lemons. Presently they passed the village church with two cypress trees like sentinels in front of it and came out again into the open.

"That 's over!" Mr. Treffry said, urging on his horses. It was wood now on either side, high pine trees breathing out into the darkness the fragrance of their gum; and every now and then amongst them could be seen the silver stems of birch trees.

"You won't give her up then?" Mr. Treffry said gruffly. "Her happiness means a lot to me."

"Ah!" said Harz with trembling lips, "to you, to *him!* And I am nothing! Do you think *I* don't care for her happiness? Is it a crime for me to love her?"

Mr. Treffry said: "Almost, Mr. Harz—considering——"

Harz bent forward: "Considering that I 've no money! Always *money!*"

To this sneer Mr. Treffry made no reply, clucking to his horses. At last he said: "My niece was born and bred a lady. I ask you plainly: What position have you got to give her?"

Harz made a quick movement: "If she marries me," he said, "she comes into my world. You think," he went on with a choke of passion in his voice, "that I—that I 'm a common——"

Mr. Treffry shook his head: "Answer my question, young man," he said.

But the painter did not answer it, and a silence fell between them.

A light breeze had now sprung up, and the whispering in the trees, the rolling of the wheels in this night progress through pine-

scented air, made Harz drowsy. He fell asleep. When he woke it was to the same tune, varied by Mr. Treffry's uneasy snoring; the reins were hanging loose, and, peering out, he saw Dominique shuffling along at the horses' heads. He joined him there, and, one on each side, they plodded on. A haze had begun to bathe the trees, the stars burnt dim, the air was colder. Mr. Treffry woke coughing. It was all like some long nightmare, an interminable experience of muffled sounds and shapes, of perpetual motion, conceived in darkness, carried out in darkness, to end in darkness. And suddenly the day broke. Heralded by the snuffle of the horses, the light dawned glimmering over caves of mystery, on a crowned chaos of lines and shadows, pale like mother-o'-pearl. The stars faded, then in a smouldering zigzag the light fled along the mountain tops, and flung out little isles of cloud. From a lake, curled in a hollow like a patch of smoke, came the cry of some great bird. A cuckoo started a soft mocking; close to the carriage a lark flew up, dropping his beads of song. Beasts and

men alike stood still, drinking in the air—all sweet of snows and dew, vibrating faintly with the running of the water and the rustling of the leaves.

The night had played sad tricks with Mr. Nicholas Treffry; his large-brimmed hat was grey with dust; his cheeks were of a brownish-purple colour; with heavy pouches underneath the eyes; those eyes too, stared with painful concentration. Harz asked him how he felt.

"Pretty well," he answered heavily. "We 'll call a halt, and give the gees their grub, poor things. Can you find some water Mr. Harz? There 's a bucket in behind. Can't get about myself this morning; make that lazy fellow of mine stir his stumps."

Harz saw that he had drawn off one of his boots, and stretched the foot out on a cushion.

"You 're not fit to go farther," he said; "you 're ill."

"Ill!" replied Mr. Treffry with scorn; "not a bit of it!"

"I shan't stir till you go back," persisted Harz.

Mr. Treffry made no reply to this, except

to thrust his chin out. Harz looked at him, then catching the bucket from the hand of Dominique, made off in search of water. When he came back the horses were feeding from an india-rubber trough slung to the pole; they stretched their heads towards the bucket, pushing aside each other's noses.

The flame in the east had died, and a gentle radiance bathed the larch trees; down below, the valley was like amber. Everywhere were threads of water, threads of snow, and little threads of dewy green, all glistening like gossamer.

Mr. Treffry called out: "Give me your arm, Mr. Harz; I 'd like to shake the reefs out of me. Steady! When one comes to stand over at the knees, it 's no such easy matter, eh?" He groaned as he put his foot down, and swayed, gripping the young man's shoulder as in a vice. Presently he lowered himself on to a stone.

" 'All over now!' as Chris would say when she was little; nasty temper she had too—kick and scream on the floor! Never lasted long though—'Kiss her! take her up! show

her the pictures!' Amazing fond of pictures Chris was!" He looked dubiously at Harz; then took a long pull at his flask. "What would the doctor say? Whiskey at four in the morning! Well! Thank the Lord! Doctors are n't always with us." He shook his head lugubriously, and took another pull. Sitting there upon the stone, with one hand pressed against his side, the other tilting up the flask that shook so dismally, he was grey from head to foot, and beads of perspiration rolled from off his forehead.

Harz had dropped on to another stone. The excitement and fatigue of the long night, after his illness, had made his feet like lead. His head was whirling, too; he shook it, swaying and muttering to himself. The next thing he remembered was that trees were walking at him, turning round, yellow from the roots up; that everything was yellow, his own feet yellow. He determined to use them. Somebody was opposite to him, jumping up and down on yellow feet, a grey bear—with a hat—Mr. Treffry—obstinate old man! He called out: "I 'll leave you!" and stood up;

some one cried: "Ha-alloo!" Mr. Treffry seemed to fall and disappear. . . .

When Harz came to himself a hand was pouring liquor into his mouth, a white and wet thing was muffled round his brows, there was a noise of humming and of hoofs, that seemed familiar. They were moving. Where? Then Mr. Treffry loomed up alongside, smoking a cigar. He was muttering disjointed words: "A low trick, Paul—bit of my mind!" Then as if a curtain had been snatched aside, the vision before Harz was clear again. He sat up. The carriage was winding between uneven, black-eaved houses, past doorways from which goats and cows were coming out, with bells about their necks. Black-eyed boys, and here and there a drowsy man with a long, cherry-stemmed pipe swinging in his teeth, stood aside to stare.

Mr. Treffry seemed to have taken a new lease of strength, and, like some old and angry dog, he stared from side to side, as who should say: "My bone! Let 's see who 's going to touch it!"

The last house vanished, glowing in the early sunshine, and the carriage with its trail

of dust became again entombed in the gloom of the tall trees, along a road cleaving upwards a wilderness of moss-grown rocks, a maze of dewy stems, through which the level sun had not yet driven paths.

Dominique came round to them, bearing the appearance of one who has seen better days, and a pot of coffee brewed upon a spirit lamp. Breakfast—he said—was served!

The horses were pacing slowly now; their ears twitched with fatigue. Mr. Treffry said to them sadly: "If *I* can see this through, you can. I know you! Get on, my beauties!"

And now the sun struck through the trees, and Mr. Treffry's strength began to ebb again. He seemed to suffer greatly; often dropped the reins; but did not complain. The trees had ceased; the sunlight was streaming down with a blinding, unchecked glare; the road had reached at last the stony pass.

"Jump up!" Mr. Treffry cried out. "D—n it, we'll make a finish of it!" and he gave the reins a jerk. The horses flung up their heads, and the bleak pass with its circling crown of jagged peaks soon slipped away beneath their tired hoofs.

Between some houses on the very top, Mr. Treffry, his face set in a grin, urged his horses on at a slow trot; soon they began slanting in angles down the mountain-side. Mr. Treffry brought them to a halt where a mule track joined the road.

"That 's all I can do for you; you 'd better leave me here," he said in a husky voice barely heard above the panting of the horses and the buzz of flies. "Keep this track down to the river—go south—you 'll be in Italy in a couple of hours. Get rail at Feltre. Money? Yes? Well! Good luck to you!" He held out his hand; Harz gripped it. "Give her up, eh?"

Harz shook his head.

"No? Well, I warn you it 'll be 'pull devil, pull baker,' then"; and clutching the tuft of his beard, Mr. Treffry bent forward. He seemed to be mustering his strength for a last attempt at dignity. "Good luck to you!" he said again, gathering the reins.

Harz watched his figure huddling again beneath the hood. The carriage moved slowly on.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHRISTIAN'S BAPTISM

AT Villa Rubein people went about, avoiding each other as if detected in conspiracy. Miss Naylor, who for an inscrutable reason had put on her Sunday frock, a purple, relieved at the chest with black and bird's-eye blue, conveyed an impression of trying to count a thing which ran about too fast for her. When Greta asked what she had lost she was heard to mutter: "Mr.—Needlecase."

Christian, with big circles round her eyes, sat at her little table all the morning. She had had no sleep. About noon Herr Paul came into the room whistling uneasily. On seeing Christian there, he stopped, gave her a furtive look, and went out again; after this he went up-stairs, took off all his clothes, flung them passionately one by one into a footbath, and went to bed.

"I might be a criminal!" he muttered to himself, while the buttons of his garments rattled on the bath.

"Am I her father, *hein?* Have I authority? Do I know the world? Bssss! I might be a frog!"

Mrs. Decie, having caused herself to be announced, presently found him smoking a cigar, and counting the flies upon the ceiling.

"If you really have done this, Paul," she said in a restrained voice, "you have done a very unkind thing, and what is worse, you have made us all ridiculous. But perhaps you have not done it?"

"Done it?" cried Herr Paul staring dreadfully: "I have done it, I tell you, I have done it——"

"Very well, you have done it—and why, pray? What conceivable good was there in it? I suppose you know that Nicholas is driving him to the frontier? Nicholas is probably more dead than alive by this time; you know his state of health."

Herr Paul's fingers came, exasperated, from underneath the bedclothes, and ploughed up his beard.

"Nicholas is mad—the girl is mad—you are all mad! Leave me alone! I want to smoke, I want to sleep, I don't want you here!" and he began again to count the flies. "I will *not* be made angry; I will *not* be worried—I am not fit for it." His prominent brown eyes stared round the room, as if looking for a way in which he might escape.

"If I may prophesy, you will be worried a good deal," said Mrs. Decie coldly, "before you have finished with this affair."

The anxious and uncertain glance which Herr Paul bestowed on her at these words aroused within her an unwilling feeling of compunction.

"You are not made for the angry father of the family," she said. "You had better give up the position, Paul; it does not suit you."

Herr Paul groaned.

"You had better give it up. I suppose it is not your fault," she added; "these things are all arranged for us."

Just then the door was opened, and Fritz announced with an air of saying the right thing:

"A gentleman of the police to see you, sir."

Herr Paul bounded in his bed.

"Keep him out!" he cried.

Mrs. Decie, handkerchief to lips, disappeared with a rustling of silk; in her place stood a stiff man in blue. . . .

The morning dragged itself away without any one being able to settle to anything, except Herr Paul, who was settled fast in bed. As was fitting in a house that had so lost its soul, meals were neglected, even by the dog.

About three o'clock a telegram was brought to Christian; it contained these words: "All right; self returns to-morrow. Treffry." After reading it she put on her hat and went out, followed close by Greta, who, watching till she thought that she would not be sent away, ran up from behind and pulled her softly by the sleeve.

"Let me come, Chris—I shall not talk."

The two girls went on together to the bridge; an old woman, selling oranges to a group of chattering girls, nodded, and called out "*Küss die Hand!*" Christian stared before her without answering.

If she could only do something for him! When they had gone some distance towards Gries she stopped, and turning to Greta, said:

"I 'm going to get his pictures, and take charge of them!"

"Oh!" said Greta timidly.

"If you are afraid," said Christian, beginning to retrace her steps, "you had better go back home."

"I am not afraid, Chris," said Greta meekly.

Neither girl spoke again till they had recrossed the bridge and taken the path along the wall. Over the tops of the vines the heat was dancing.

"Look at the sun-fairies on the vines!" said Greta to herself.

Christian began to run. Her resolve had brought her comfort. It was something definite, something to help; to think of disappointment was intolerable.

At the old house they stopped, and Christian, breathing quickly, pushed the door; it was immovable. They stared at one another.

"Look!" said Greta, "they have screwed

it!" and she pointed out three screws with a rosy-tipped forefinger.

Christian stamped her foot.

"We must n't stand here," she said; "let 's sit on that bench and think."

"Yes," murmured Greta, "let us think." And dangling an end of hair, she regarded Christian with her wide blue eyes.

Christian cried at last:

"I can't make any plan, while you stare at me like that."

"I was thinking," said Greta humbly, "if they have screwed it up, perhaps we shall screw it down again; there is the big screw-driver of Fritz."

"It would take a long time; people are always passing."

"People do not pass in the evening," murmured Greta, "because the gate at our end is always shut."

Christian rose.

"We will come this evening, just before the gate is shut."

"But, Chris, how shall we get back again?"

"I don't know; I mean to have the pictures."

"It is not a high gate," murmured Greta.

After dinner the girls went to their room, Greta bearing with her the big screw-driver. At dusk they slipped down-stairs and out.

They arrived at the old house, and stood, panting, in the shadow of the doorway. The only sounds that came to them were those of distant barking dogs, and of sleepy bugles at the barracks.

"Quick," whispered Christian; and Greta, with all the strength of her small hands, began to turn the screws. It was some time before they yielded; the third was very obstinate, till Christian took the screw-driver and passionately gave the screw the starting twist.

"It is like a pig—that one," said Greta, rubbing her wrists mournfully.

The opened door revealed the gloom of the dank rooms and twisting staircase, then fell to behind them with a clatter.

Greta gave a little scream, and caught her sister's dress.

"It *is* dark," she gasped, "oh, Chris! it *is* dark!"

Christian groped for the bottom stair; Greta felt her arm shaking.

"Suppose there is a man to keep guard! Oh, Chris, suppose there are *bats!*"

"You are a baby!" Christian answered in a trembling voice. "You had better go home!"

Greta choked a little in the dark.

"I am—not—going home, but I 'm afraid of bats. Oh, Chris, are n't you afraid?"

"Yes," said Christian, "but I 'm going to have the pictures."

Her cheeks were burning; she was trembling all over. Having found the bottom step she began to mount with Greta clinging to her skirts.

The haze above inspired a little courage in the child, who, of all things, hated darkness. The curtain across the doorway of the loft had fallen down, and there was nothing to veil the empty room revealed by fading twilight.

"Nobody here, you see," said Christian.

"No-o," whispered Greta; and, running to the window, she stood clinging to the wall, like one of the bats she dreaded so.

"But they *have* been here!" cried Christian angrily. "Look! they have broken this." She pointed to fragments of a plaster cast upon the floor.

Out of the corner she began to pull the canvases set in rough, wooden frames, dragging them with all her strength.

"Help me!" she cried; "it will be dark directly."

They collected a heap of sketches and three large pictures, piling them before the window, and peering at them in the failing light.

Greta said ruefully:

"Oh, Chris! They *are* heavy ones; we shall never carry them, and the gate is shut!"

Christian took a pointed knife from off the table.

"I shall cut them out of the frames," she said. "Listen! What 's that?"

It was the sound of whistling, and it stopped beneath the window. The girls, clasping each other's hands, dropped on their knees.

"Hallo!" called out a voice.

Greta crept to the window, and, placing her face level with the floor, peered over.

"Hang him—not in!" the voice said; there were sounds of one retreating.

"It is only Dr. Edmund; he does n't know, then," whispered Greta. "I shall call him."

"Don't!" cried Christian, catching her sister's dress.

"He would help us," Greta said reproachfully, "and it would not be so dark if he were here."

Christian's cheeks were burning.

"I don't choose," she said, and she began handling the pictures, feeling their edges with her knife.

"Chris! Suppose anybody came?"

"The door is screwed," Christian answered absently.

"Oh, Chris! We screwed it unscrewed; anybody who wishes shall come!"

Christian, leaning her chin in her hands, gazed at her thoughtfully.

"It will take a long time to cut these pictures out carefully. You must screw me up, and go home. In the morning you must

come early, when the gate is open, unscrew me again, and help carry the pictures."

Greta did not answer her at once. At last she gave her head a violent shake.

"I am afraid," she gasped.

"We can't both stay here all night," said Christian; "if any one comes to our room there will be nobody to answer. We can't lift these canvases over the gate. One of us *must* go back; you can climb over the gate —there is nothing to be afraid of."

Greta pressed her hands together.

"Do you want the pictures badly, Chris?"

Christian nodded.

"Very badly, Chris?"

"Yes—yes—yes!"

Greta remained sitting where she was, and shivered violently, as a little animal will shiver when it scents out danger. At last she rose slowly to her feet.

"I am going," she said in a despairing voice. Pausing at the doorway, she turned round.

"If Miss Naylor shall ask me where you are, Chris, I shall be telling her a story."

Christian started.

"I forgot that—Oh! Greta, I am sorry; *I* will go instead."

Greta took another step—a quick one.

"I shall die if I stay here alone," she said; "I can tell her that you are in bed; then you must go to bed here, Chris, so it shall be true after all."

Christian came close and threw her arms about her.

"I am *so* sorry, darling; I wish I could go instead. But if you have to tell a story, I would tell a proper one."

"Would you?" said Greta doubtfully.

"Yes."

"I think," said Greta to herself, beginning to descend the stairs, "I think I will tell it in *my* way." She shuddered and went on groping in the darkness.

Christian clasped her hands to her breast, and listened for the sound of screws. It came slowly, threatening her with danger, as it seemed, and solitude.

Sinking on her knees she began to rip the canvas of a picture. Her heart throbbed

stressfully; at the stir of wind-breath or any note of distant clamour she stopped, and held her breathing. No sounds came near, and she toiled on, tearing the stiff canvas from the frames, trying only to think that she was at the very spot where last night his arms had been around her. How long ago it seemed! She was full of vague terror, overmastered by the darkness, dreadfully alone. The glow of resolution, so new to her, seemed suddenly to die down in her heart, and leave her cold.

She would never be fit to be his wife, to give him everything, if at the first test her courage failed! She set her teeth, slitting away and tugging; and suddenly she felt a kind of exultation, as if she too were entering into life, were knowing something within herself that she had never known before. Her fingers hurt, and the pain gave pleasure; her cheeks were burning; her breath came fast. They could not stop her now! This feverish task in darkness was her real baptism. She finished; and rolling the pictures very carefully tied them with a cord. She

had done something for him now! Nobody could take that from her! She had a part of him and he was bound to her! This night had made him hers! Let them do their worst! She lay down on his mattress and soon fell asleep. . . .

She was awakened by Scruff's tongue against her face. Greta was standing by her side.

"Wake up, Chris! The gate is open!"

In the cold early light she seemed to glow with warmth and colour; her eyes were dancing and she tugged at Christian.

"I am not afraid now; Scruff and I sat up all night, to catch the morning—I—*think* it was fun; and oh! Chris!" she ended with a gleam of rueful triumph in her eyes, "*I told it.*"

Christian hugged her.

"Come—quick! There is nobody about. Are those the pictures?"

Supporting each an end, the girls bore the bundle down the stairs, and set out with their corpse-like burden along the wall-path between the river and the vines.

CHAPTER XIX

BEGINNING OF THE END

HIDDEN by the shade of rose-bushes Greta lay stretched at length, cheek on arm, sleeping the sleep of the unrighteous. Through the flowers the sun touched her, made bold to flick her parted lips with kisses, to spill upon her here and there a withered petal. In a denser isle of shade, Scruff, concerned as to his toes and the buzzing of a fly, pretended vigilance. His head lolled drowsily in the middle of a snap, snapped in the middle of a loll.

At three o'clock Miss Naylor too came out, carrying a basket and a pair of scissors. Lifting her skirts she stepped precisely, to avoid the lakes of water left by the garden hose; in front of a rose-bush she dropped her skirts and began to snip the shrivelled flowers. The little lady's silvered head and

thin, brown face sustained the shower of sunlight unprotected, and in their freedom and simplicity distilled a gentle dignity.

Presently, while the scissors flittered in and out of the leaves, she began talking to herself.

"If girls were more like what they used to be, this would not have happened. Perhaps we don't understand; it 's very easy to forget." Burying her nose and lips in a crimson rose she sniffed. "Poor dear girl! It is such a pity his father is—a——"

"A farmer," said a sleepy voice behind the rose-bush.

Miss Naylor leaped: "Greta! How you startled me! A farmer—that is—an—an agriculturalist!"

"A farmer with vineyards—he told us, and he is not ashamed. Why is it a pity, Miss Naylor?"

Miss Naylor made her lips look very thin.

"For many reasons, of which you can know nothing."

"That is what you always say," pursued the sleepy voice; "and that is why, when I am to be married, there shall also be a pity."

"Greta!" Miss Naylor cried, "it is not the proper thing for a girl of your age to talk like that."

"Why?" said Greta: "because it is the truth?"

Miss Naylor made no reply to this, but vexedly cut off a rose which she hastily picked up and regarded with contrition. Greta spoke again:

"Chris said: 'I have got the pictures, I shall tell her;' but *I* shall tell you instead, because it was I that told the story."

Miss Naylor stared at her, wrinkling her nose, and holding the scissors wide apart.

"Last night," said Greta slowly, "I and Chris went to his studio and took his pictures, and so, because the gate was shut, I came back to tell it; and when you asked me where Chris was, I told it; because she was in the studio all night, and I and Scruff sat up all night, and in the morning we brought the pictures, and hid them under our beds, and that is why—we—are—so—sleepy."

Over the rose-bush Miss Naylor peered at her; and though she was obliged to stand

on tiptoe this did not quite destroy her dignity.

"I am surprised at you, Greta; I am surprised at Christian, more surprised at Christian. The world seems topsy-turvy."

Greta, a sunbeam entangled in her hair, regarded her with eyes inscrutable and innocent.

"When you were a girl, I think you would be sure to be in love," she murmured drowsily.

Miss Naylor, flushing a deep pink, snipped off another healthy bud.

"And so, because you are not married, I think—I think——"

Miss Naylor's hand hovered, and the scissors hissed.

Greta nestled down again. "I think it is wicked to cut off all the buds," she said, and shut her eyes.

Miss Naylor continued to peer across the rose-bush, and her thin face, close to the glistening leaves, had become oddly soft and pink and girlish. At a deeper breath from Greta, the little lady placed the basket on the ground, and began walking up and down,

followed dubiously by Scruff, whose eyes asked questions of her back. At one of the turns she met Christian coming from the arbour, with wool and knitting-needles in her hand.

Miss Naylor, shy and friendly, slipped her arm into the girl's, and drew her to walking back and forth across the grass; and though she made no sound, her lips kept opening and shutting, like the beak of a bird that contemplates a worm.

Christian spoke first:

"Miss Naylor, I want to tell you please—"

"Oh, my dear! I know; Greta has been in the confessional before you," and she gave the girl's arm a squeeze. "Is n't it a lovely day? Did you ever see 'Five Fingers' look so beautiful?" This she always said when at a loss; and pointed to the great peaks of the *Fünffingerspitze* glittering in the sun like giant crystals.

"I like them better with the clouds about them."

"Well," agreed Miss Naylor nervously, "they certainly are nicer with the clouds

about them. They look almost hot and greasy, don't they. . . . My dear!" she said, giving Christian's arm a dozen little squeezes, "we all of us—we all of us——"

Christian's eyes grew bright, her lips trembled.

"My dear," Miss Naylor tried again, "I am far—that is, I mean, to all of us at some time or another—and then you see—well—it is hard!"

Christian shrank, but kissed the gloved hand resting on her arm. Miss Naylor bobbed her head; a tear trickled gently off her nose.

"Do let us wind your skein of wool!" she said with a peculiar gaiety.

Some half-hour later Mrs. Decie, standing in the shadow of the house, called to Christian across the lawn.

"My dear!" she said; "come here a minute; I have a message for you."

Christian went; her heart was beating, but there was an odd, set look about her mouth and chin.

Her aunt was sitting back to the light, tapping a bowl of goldfish with the tip of her

polished finger-nail; the room was very cool. She thrust her face a little forward at the girl, and held a letter out. "Your uncle is not coming back to-night," she said. Christian took the letter. It was worded curtly thus, in a thin, toppling hand:

"AUER, 6.15.

"DEAR CONSTANCE,

"Can't get back to-night. Sending Dominique for things. Tell Christian to come over with him for night if possible.

"Yr. aff. brother

"NCHLS. TREFFRY."

"Dominique has a carriage here," said Mrs. Decie. "You will have nice time to catch the train. Give my love to your uncle. You must take Barbi with you, I insist on that." She rose unexpectedly from her chair and held Christian's hand: "My dear! You look very tired—very! almost ill. I don't like to see you look like that. Come! Come!" She thrust her pale lips forward, and kissed the girl's pale cheek.

Then as Christian left the room Mrs.

Decie sank back in her chair, with creases in her forehead, and began languidly to cut a magazine. "Poor Christian!" she thought, "how hardly she does take it! I am sorry for her; but perhaps it 's just as well, as things are turning out. Psychologically it is very interesting!"

Christian found her things packed, and the two servants waiting. In a few minutes they were driving to the station. She made Dominique take the seat opposite.

"Well?" she asked him.

Dominique bowed; his eyebrows twitched, he smiled a deprecating smile.

"M'mselle, Mr. Treffry told me to hold my tongue."

"But you can tell *me*, Dominique; Barbi can't understand."

"To you, then, M'mselle," he answered with the gesture of a man accepting fate; "to *you*, then, who will doubtless forget all that I shall tell you—my master is not well; he has terrible pain here; he has a cough; he is not well at all; not well at all."

A feeling of dismay seized on the girl.

"We were a caravan for all that night," Dominique resumed with nods. "In the morning by noon we ceased to be a caravan; M'sieu Harz took a mule path; he will be in Italy—certainly in Italy. As for us, we stayed at San Martino, and my master went to bed. It was time; with his clothes I had much trouble, his legs were swollen. In the afternoon came a signor of police, on horseback, red and hot; I persuaded him how we were at Paneveggio, but as we were not, he came back angry—*Mon Dié!* as angry as a cat. It was not good to meet him—when he was with my master I was outside. There was much noise—much noise. I do not know what passed, but at last the signor came out through the door, and went away all in a hurry." Dominique's features were fixed in a sardonic grin; he rubbed the palm of one hand with the finger of the other. "Mr. Treffry made me give him whiskey afterwards, and he had no money to pay the bill—that I know because I paid it. Well, M'mselle, to-day he would be dressed and very slowly we came as far as Auer; there

he could do no more, so went to bed. He is not well at all."

Christian was overwhelmed by her forebodings; and all the rest of the journey was made in silence, except when Barbi, a country girl, filled with the delirium of railway travel, sighed out: "*Ach! gnädiges Fräulein!*" looking at Christian with her pleasant eyes.

Arriving at the little hostel Christian went at once to see her uncle. His room was darkened by the closing of the shutters, and smelt of beeswax.

"That you, Dominique?" he said.

"No, I."

"Ah! Chris, glad to see you."

Christian saw his figure, dressed in a blue flannel gown, a rug over the feet, lying on a couch lengthened artificially by chairs; the arm he reached out issued many inches from its sleeve, and showed the corded veins about his wrist. Christian, settling his pillows, looked anxiously into his eyes.

Mr. Treffry coughed.

"I 'm not quite the thing, Chris," he said.

"Somehow, not quite the thing. I 'll come back with you to-morrow."

"Let me send for Dr. Dawney, Uncle?"

"What d' you take me for? No—no! Plenty of him when I get home. Very good young fellow, as doctors go, but I can't stand his puddin's—slops and puddin's, and all that trumpery medicine on the top. Send me Dominique, old girl—I 'll put myself to rights a bit!" He fingered his unshaven cheek, and clutched the gown together on his chest. 'Got this from the landlord. When you come back we 'll have a little talk!" He gave her a shrewd glance.

When she came into the room an hour later, he was asleep. Watching his cheeks twitch with his uneasy breathing, she wondered what it was that he was going to say.

He looked so ill! And suddenly she realised that her thoughts were not of him. . . . When she was little he would take her on his back; he had built cocked hats for her and paper boats; he taught her to ride; slid her between his knees; gave her things without number; and took his payment out in kisses.

And now he was ill, and she was not thinking of him! He had been all that was most dear to her and yet before her eyes would only come the vision of another.

Mr. Treffry woke suddenly, and said: "Not been asleep, have I? The beds here are so infernal hard."

"Uncle Nic, won't you give me news of him?"

Mr. Treffry looked at her, and Christian could not bear that look.

"He 's safe into Italy; they are n't very keen after him, it 's so long ago, you see; I squared 'em pretty easily. Now, look here, Chris!"

Christian came quite close; he took her hand.

"I 'd like to see you pull yourself together. 'T is n't so much the position; 't is n 't so much the money; because after all there's always mine—" Christian shook her head, and would have spoken. "But," he went on with shaky emphasis, "there's the blood, and that 's a serious thing; and there 's this anarch—this political affair; and there 's the

sort of life, an' that 's a serious thing; but—what I 'm coming to is this, Chris—there 's the man!"

Christian drew away her hand. Mr. Treffry went on:

"I 'm an old chap and fond of you, and I must speak out what I think. He 's got pluck, he 's strong, and he 's in earnest; but he 's got a damned hot temper, he 's an egotist, and—he 's not the man for you. If you marry him, Chris, as sure as I lie here, you 'll be sorry for it. You 're not your father's child for nothing; nice fellow as ever lived he was, but soft as butter. If you marry this chap, it 'll be like mixing earth and ironstone, and they don't blend!" He dropped his head back on the pillows, and stretching out his hand, said wistfully: "Take my word for it, old girl, he 's not the man for you."

Christian, staring at the wall beyond, said quietly, "I *can't* take any one's word for that."

"Ah!" muttered Mr. Treffry, "you 're obstinate enough, but obstinacy is n't strength.

You 'll give up everything to him, you 'll lick his shoes; and you 'll never play but second fiddle in his life. He 'll always be first with himself, he and his work, or whatever he calls painting pictures; and some day you 'll find that out. You won't like it and I don't like it for you, Chris, and that 's flat."

He wiped his brow where the perspiration stood thick in beads.

Christian said: "You don't understand; you don't believe in him; you don't see! If I do come after his work—if I do give him everything, and he can't give all back —I don't care! He 'll give what he can; I don't want any more. If you 're afraid of the life for me, uncle, if you think it 'll be too hard——"

Mr. Treffry bowed his head. "I do, Chris," he said.

"I hate to be wrapped up in cotton wool; I want to breathe. If I come to grief, it 's my own affair, and nobody need mind."

Mr. Treffry's fingers sought his beard. "Yes, yes," he said. "Give me a kiss, old girl; I 'm tired."

Christian sank on her knees.

"Oh, uncle! I 'm a selfish beast!"

Mr. Treffry laid his hand against her cheek. "I think I could do with a nap," he said.

Swallowing a lump in her throat, she stole out of the room.

CHAPTER XX

HABET

BY a stroke of Fate Mr. Treffry's return fell upon the psychological moment when Herr Paul, in a suit of rather too bright blue, was starting for Vienna.

When he saw the carriage appear between the poplars he became as pensive as a boy caught stealing cherries. Pitching his hat-box petulantly to Fritz, he recovered himself, however, in time to whistle while Mr. Treffry was being assisted to the house. Having forgotten his anger, he was only anxious now to smooth out all unpleasantness; and in the glances that he cast at Christian and his brother-in-law there was a kind of shamed entreaty which seemed to say: "For goodness' sake, don't worry me again about that business! You see that nothing 's come of it."

He came forward: "Ah! *Mon cher!* So

you return; I put off my departure, then. Vienna must wait for me—that poor Vienna!" and hastened to lend his arm.

"Thank you, Paul," Mr. Treffry remarked with quiet sarcasm, and Herr Paul, noticing the extreme feebleness of his advance, exclaimed with genuine concern:

"What is it? You 're ill? My God!—you 're ill!" and, disappearing, spent five minutes among bottles, after which he came out, bearing a whitish liquid in a glass.

"There!" he said, "good for the gout—good for a cough—good for everything!"

Mr. Treffry sniffed at it, drained the glass, and sucked in his moustache.

"Ah!" he said. "Tastes uncommonly like gin;" and with a motion of his hand he stopped Christian, who was moving to the door.

"Stop, Chris!" he said. "Shake hands, you two!"

Christian looked from one man to the other; at last she held her hand out to Herr Paul, who brushed it with his moustache, looking at her as she left the room with a very queer expression on his face.

"My dear!" he began, "you support her in this—this execrable matter? You forget my position, you make me ridiculous—absurd—funny. I have been obliged to go to bed in my own house, absolutely to go to bed, because I was in danger of becoming funny."

"Look here, Paul!" Mr. Treffry said gruffly, "no one shall bully Chris. If any one's to bully her, it 's I."

"In that case," returned Herr Paul sarcastically, "I will go to Vienna."

"You may go to the devil!" said Mr. Treffry; "and I 'll tell you what—in my opinion it was low to set the police on that young chap; a low, dirty trick."

Herr Paul divided his beard carefully in two, and appeared to ponder; at last he took his seat on the very edge of an arm-chair, and, placing his hands on his parted knees, said:

"I have regretted it since—*mais, que diable!* He called me a coward—it is very hot weather! —there were drinks at the *Kurhaus*—I am her guardian—the affair is a very beastly one, you know—there were more drinks—I

was a little—*enfin!*" He shrugged his shoulders. "Adieu, my dear; I shall be some time in Vienna; I need rest!" He walked to the door, and turning round, waved his cigar. "Adieu! adieu! Be good; get well! I will buy you some cigars up there." And going out, he shut the door adroitly on an answer.

Mr. Treffry moved his head uneasily like an animal in pain. Presently he lay back against the cushions. The clock ticked; the pigeons cooed on the veranda; a door opened in the distance, for a moment a treble voice was heard. Mr. Treffry's head drooped forward; across his face, gloomy and rugged, a thin line of sunlight fell.

The clock suddenly stopped ticking, and outside, in mysterious accord, the pigeons rose, fluttering their wings, and flew away. With a startled, heavy movement Mr. Treffry sat up. He tried to get on to his feet and reach the bell, but he could not, and sat on the side of the couch with heavy drops of sweat rolling off his forehead, and his hands clawing and clawing at his chest. There was no sound at all throughout the house. He

looked about him, and tried to call, but again he could not. He tried once more to reach the bell, and failed; he sat still, alone, with a thought that made him cold.

"I 'm done for," he muttered; "by George! I believe I 'm done for this time!" His eyes, under the folds of their lids, were fixed in a heavy stare. The door was opened; a voice behind him said:

"How are you, sir? Can we have a look at you?"

Mr. Treffry did not stir.

"Ah! Doctor," he muttered, "bear a hand, there 's a good fellow."

Dawney caught him under the arms, and propping him against the cushions, loosened his shirt. Receiving no answer to his questions he stepped alarmed towards the bell. Mr. Treffry stopped him with a sign.

"Let 's hear what you make of me," he said.

He shut his eyes. When Dawney had examined him, he opened them again.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well," answered Dawney, slowly, "there's trouble here, of course."

Mr. Treffry broke out with a husky whisper: "Out with it, Doctor; don't humbug me."

Dawney bent down, and took his wrist.

"I don't know how you 've got into this state, sir," he said with the brusqueness of emotion. "You 're in a bad way. It 's the old trouble; and you know what that means as well as I do. All I can tell you is, I 'm going to have a big fight with it. It shan't be my fault, there 's my hand on that."

Mr. Treffry lay for a minute or two with his eyes fixed on the ceiling; at last he moved his hand, and tugging at his beard, said:

"I want to live. D 'ye hear, Doctor ?"

"Yes—yes."

"I feel better now; don't make a fuss about it. Patch me up, for the sake of my niece."

Dawney nodded. "One minute," he said; "there are a few things I want," and he went out.

A moment later Greta stole in on tiptoe. She bent over till her hair touched Mr. Treffry's face.

"Uncle Nic!" she whispered. He opened his eyes.

"Hallo, Greta!"

'I have come to bring you my love, Uncle Nic, and to say good-bye, because I am going to Vienna. Papa says that I and Scruff and Miss Naylor are going to Vienna with him; we have had to pack in half an hour; in five minutes we are going to Vienna, and it is my first visit there, Uncle Nic."

"To Vienna!" Mr. Treffry repeated slowly. "Don't you have a guide, Greta; they 're humbugs."

"No, Uncle Nic," said Greta solemnly.

"Draw the curtains, old girl, let 's have a look at you. Why, you 're as smart as ninepence!"

"Yes," said Greta with a sigh, touching the buttons of her cape with tender fingers; "I am smart because I am going to Vienna, but I am sorry to leave you, Uncle Nic."

"Are you, Greta?"

"Yes—but you will have Chris, and you are fonder of Chris than of me, Uncle Nic."

"I 've known her longer."

"Perhaps when you have known me as long as Chris, you shall be as fond of me."

"When I 've known you as long—may be."

"While I am gone, Uncle Nic, you are to get well, because you are not very well, you know."

"What put that into your head ?"

"If you were well you would be smoking a cigar—it is just three o'clock. This kiss is for myself, this is for Scruff, and this is for Miss Naylor."

She stood upright again, a tremulous and joyful gravity in her eyes and on her lips.

"Good-bye, my dear; take care of yourselves; and don't you have a guide, they 're humbugs."

"No, Uncle Nic. There is the carriage! To Vienna, Uncle Nic!" The dead gold of her hair gleamed in the doorway. Mr. Treffry raised himself upon his elbow.

"Give us one more, for l-luck!"

Greta ran back.

"I love you very much!" she said, and kissing him, backed slowly, then, turning, flew out like a bird.

Mr. Treffry fixed his eyes on the shut door.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LETTERS

AFTER many days of hot, still weather, the wind had come, and whirled the dust along the white, parched roads. The leaves were all astir with fluttering, like tiny wings. Round Villa Rubein the pigeons cooed uneasily, all other birds were silent. Late in the afternoon Christian came out on the veranda, reading a letter:

"DEAR CHRIS:

"We are here now six days, and it is a very large place with many churches. In the first place then we have been to a great many, but the nicest of them is not St. Stephan's Kirche, it is another but I do not remember the name. Papa is out nearly all the night; he says he is resting here, so he is not able to come to the churches with us,

but I do not think he rests very much. The day before yesterday we, that is, Papa, I, and Miss Naylor, went to an exhibition of pictures. It was quite beautiful and interesting (Miss Naylor says it is not right to say 'quite' beautiful, but I do not know what other word could mean 'quite' except the word 'quite,' because it is not exceedingly and not extremely.) And oh! Chris, there was one picture painted by *him;* it was about a ship without masts—Miss Naylor says it is a barge, but I do not know what a barge is—on fire, and floating down a river in a fog. I think it is extremely beautiful. Miss Naylor says it is very impressionistick—what is that ? and Papa said 'Puh!' but he did not know it was painted by Herr Harz, so I did not tell him.

"There has also been staying at our hotel that Count Sarelli who came one evening to dinner at our house, but he is gone away now. He sat all day in the winter garden reading, and at night he went out with Papa. Miss Naylor says he is unhappy, but *I* think he does not take enough exercise; and oh!

Chris, one day he said to me, 'That is your sister, Mademoiselle, that young lady in the white dress? Does she always wear white dresses?' and I said to him: 'It is not always a white dress; in the picture it is green, because the picture is called *Spring*.' But I did not tell him the colours of all your dresses because he looked so tired. Then he said to me: 'She is very charming.' So I tell you this, Chris, because I think you shall like to know. Scruff has a sore toe, it is because he has eaten too much meat.

"It is not nice without you, Chris, and Miss Naylor says I am improving my mind here, but I do not think it shall improve very much, because at night I like it always best, when the shops are lighted and the carriages are driving past; then I am wanting to dance. The first night Papa said he would take me to the theatre, but yesterday he said it was not good for me, perhaps to-morrow he shall think it good for me again.

"Yesterday we have been in the Prater, and saw many people, and some that Papa

knew; and then came the most interesting part of all, sitting under the trees in the rain for two hours because we could not get a carriage (very exciting.)

"There is one young lady here, only she is not any longer very young, who knew Papa when he was a boy. I like her very much; she shall soon know me quite to the bottom and is very kind.

"The ill husband of Cousin Teresa who went with us to Meran and lost her umbrella and Dr. Edmund was so sorry about it, has been very much worse, so she is not here but in Baden. I wrote to her but have no news, so I do not know whether he is still living or not, at any rate he can't get well again so soon (and I don't think he ever shall). I think as the weather is very warm you and Uncle Nic are sitting much out of doors. I am sending presents to you all in a wooden box and screwed very firm, so you shall have to use again the big screw-driver of Fritz. For Aunt Constance, photographs; for Uncle Nic, a green bird on a stand with a hole in the back of the bird to put his ashes

in, it is a good green and not expensif please tell him, because he does not like expensif presents (Miss Naylor says the bird has an inquiring eye—it is a parrat); for you, a little brooch of turquoise because I like them best; for Dr. Edmund a machine to weigh medicines in because he said he could not get a good one in Botzen; this is a very good one, the shopman told me so, and is the most expensif of all the presents—so that is all my money, except two gulden. If Papa shall give me some more, I shall buy for Miss Naylor a parasol, because it is useful and the handle of hers is 'wobbley' (that is one of Dr. Edmund's words and I like it).

"Good-bye for this time. Greta sends you her kiss.

"P. S. Miss Naylor has read all this letter (except about the parasol) and there are several things she did not want me to put, so I have copied it without the things, but at the last I have kept that copy myself, so that is why this is smudgy and several words are not spelt well, *but all the things are here.*"

Christian read, smiling, but when she finished, the talisman was gone, and her face was troubled. A sudden draught blew her hair about, and from within, Mr. Treffry's cough came to mingle with the soughing of the wind; the clouds were blackening fast. She turned back through the window, and, sitting down, rested her elbow on the table. After some minutes she took a pen and wrote, slowly at first, then fast:

"My Friend:

"Why have n't you written to me? It is so long to wait. Uncle says you are in Italy—it is dreadful not to know for certain. You would have written if you could; and I can't help thinking of all the things that may have happened. I am unhappy. Uncle Nic is ill; he will not confess it, that is his way; but he is *very* ill. Though perhaps you will never see this, I must write down all my thoughts, it seems more honest. Sometimes I feel that I am brutal to be always thinking about you, scheming how to be with you again, when he is lying there

so ill. How good he has always been to me; it is terrible that love should pull one so apart. Surely love should be beautiful, and peaceful; instead, it is filling me with bitter, wicked thoughts. I love you—and I love him; I feel as if I were torn in two. Why should it be so? Why should the beginning of one life mean the ending of another, one love the destruction of another? I don't understand. The same spirit makes me love you and him, the same sympathy, the same trust —yet it sometimes seems as if I were a criminal in loving you. You know what he thinks—he is too honest not to have shown you. He has talked to me; he likes you in a way, but you are a foreigner—he says—your life is not my life. 'He is not the man for you!' Those were his words. And now he does n't talk to me, but when I am in the room he looks at me—that 's worse—a thousand times; when he talks it rouses me to fight—when it 's his eyes only, I 'm a coward at once; I feel I would do anything, anything, only not to hurt him. Why can't he see? Is it because he's old and we are young? He may

consent, but he will never, never see; it will always hurt him.

"I want to tell you everything; I have had worse thoughts than these—sometimes I have thought that I should never have the courage to face the struggle against everything which you have to face. Then I feel quite broken; it is like something giving way in me, as if my mind fell sick. Then I think of you, and it is over; but it has been there, and I am ashamed—I told you that I was a coward. It 's like the feeling one would have going out into a storm on a dark night, away from a warm fire—only it 's of the spirit not the body—that makes it worse. I had to tell you this; you must n't think of it again, I mean to fight it away and forget that it ever has been there. But Uncle Nic —what am I to do? I hate myself because I am young, and he is old and weak—sometimes I seem to hate him. I have all sorts of thoughts, and always at the end of them, like a dark hole at the end of a passage, the thought that I ought to give you up. Tell me, ought I? I want to know, I want

to do what is right; I still want to do that, though sometimes I think I am all made of evil.

"Do you remember once when we were talking, you said: 'Nature always has an answer for every question; you cannot get an answer from laws, conventions, theories, words, only from Nature can you get it'? What do you say to me now; do you tell me it is *Nature* to come to you in spite of everything, and so, that it must be right? I think you would; but can it be Nature to do something which will hurt terribly one whom I love and who loves me? If it is—Nature is cruel. Is that one of the 'lessons of life'? Is that what Aunt Constance means when she says: 'If life were not a paradox, we could not get on at all'? I am beginning to see that everything *has* its dark side; I never believed that before.

"Uncle Nic dreads the life for me; he does n't understand (how should he?—he has always had money) how life can be tolerable without money—it is horrible the accident of money should make such difference in our lives.

I am sometimes afraid myself, and I can't outface that fear in him; he sees the shadow of his fear in me—his eyes seem to see everything that is in me now; the eyes of old people are the saddest things in all the world. I am writing like a wretched coward, but you will never see this letter I suppose, and so it does n't matter; but if you do, and I pray that you may,—well, if I am only worth the taking at my best, I am not worth taking. I want you to know the worst of me—you, and no one else.

"With Uncle Nic it is not as with my stepfather; his opposition only makes me angry, mad, ready to do anything, but with Uncle Nic I feel so bruised—so sore. He said: 'It is not so much the money, because there is always mine.' I could never do a thing he cannot bear, and take his money, and you would never let me. One knows very little of anything in the world till trouble comes. You know how it is with flowers and trees; in the early spring they look so quiet and self-contained; then all in a moment they are changed—I think it

must be like that with the heart. I used to think I knew a great deal, understood why and how things came about; I thought self-possession and reason all so easy; now I know nothing. And nothing in the world matters but to see you and hide away from that look in Uncle Nic's eyes. Three months ago I did not know you, now I write like this. Whatever I look at, I try to see as you would see; I feel, now you are away even more than when you were with me, what your thoughts would be, how you would feel about this or that. Some things you have said seem always in my mind like light——"

A slanting drift of rain was striking the veranda tiles with a cold and ceaseless hissing. Christian closed the window, and went into her uncle's room.

He was lying with closed eyes, growling at Dominique, who moved about in noiseless slippers, putting the room ready for the night. When he had finished, and with a compassionate bow had left the room, Mr. Treffry opened his eyes, and said:

"This is beastly stuff of the doctor's,

Chris, it puts my monkey up; I can't help swearing after I 've taken it; it 's as beastly as a vulgar woman's laugh and I don't know anything beastlier than that!"

"I have a letter from Greta, Uncle Nic; shall I read it?"

He nodded, beating a tattoo on the bedclothes with his fingers. Christian read the letter, leaving out the mention of Harz, and for some undefined reason the part about Sarelli.

"Ay!" said Mr. Treffry with a feeble laugh, "Greta an' her money! Send her some more, Chris. Wish I were a youngster again; that 's a beast of a proverb about a dog and his day. I 'd like to go fishing again in the West Country! We had a fine time when we were youngsters. You don't get such times these days. 'T was n't often the fishing smacks went out without us. We 'd watch their lights from our bedroom window; when they were swung aboard we were out and down to the quay before you could say 'knife.' They always waited for us; but your Uncle Jan was favourite, he

was the chap for luck. When I get on my legs, we might go down there, you and I? For a bit, just to see? What d' you say, old girl?"

Their eyes met.

"I 'd like to look at the smack lights going to sea on a dark night; pity you 're such a duffer in a boat—we might go out with them. Do you a power of good! You 're not looking the thing, my dear."

His voice died wistfully, and Christian's glance, sweeping his face, flew back to her hands, in which she held and twisted Greta's letter. After a minute or two of silence Mr. Treffry boomed out with sudden energy:

"After dinner your aunt 'll want to come and sit with me; don't let her, old girl, I can't stand it. Tell her I 'm asleep—the doctor 'll be here directly; ask him to make up some humbug for you—it 's his business."

He was seized by a violent fit of pain which seemed to stab his breath away, and when it was over signed that he would be left alone. Christian went back to her letter in the other

room, and had written these words, when the gong summoned her to dinner:

"I 'm like a leaf in the wind, I put out my hand to one thing, and it 's seized and twisted and flung aside. I want you—I want you; if I could see you I think I should know what to do——"

CHAPTER XXII

HARZ RETURNS

THE rain drove with increasing fury. The night was very black. Nicholas Treffry slept heavily. At the side of his bed the night-lamp glowed, casting on the wall a bright disk festooned by the hanging shadow of the ceiling. Christian leaned over him. Across the huddled clothes his hand, pressed to his chest, heaved with his breathing. Tears gathered slowly in her eyes. For the moment he filled all her heart, lying there, so helpless. Fearful of waking him she slipped into the sitting-room, and stood still. Outside at the window stood a man with his face pressed to the pane. Her heart thumped; she went up and unlatched the window. Harz stood there with rain dripping off him. He let fall his hat and cape.

"You!" she said, touching his sleeve. "You! You!"

He was sodden with rain, his face was drawn and tired; a dark growth of beard covered his cheeks and chin.

"Where is your uncle?" he said; "I want to see him first."

"Hush!" She put her hand up to his lips, but he caught it and covered it with kisses.

"He 's asleep—ill—speak gently!"

He muttered: "I came to him first."

Christian tried in the gloom to read his thoughts.

"Ah! Let me see you!" he entreated; "it is so dark."

She lit the lamp; and he looked at her hungrily without a word. At last he said:

"It 's not possible to go on like this; I came to tell your uncle so. He is a *man*. As for the other, I will have nothing to do with him! I came back on foot across the mountains. It 's not possible to go on like this, Christian."

She handed him her letter. He held it to the light, clearing his brow of raindrops.

When he had read to the last word he gave it to her back and whispered: "Come!"

Her lips moved, but she did not speak.

"While this goes on I can't work; I can do nothing. I can't—I won't bargain with my work; if it 's to be that, we had better end it. What are we waiting for? Sooner or later we must come to this. I 'm sorry that he 's ill, God knows! But that changes nothing. To wait is tying me hand and foot —it 's making me afraid! Fear kills! It will kill you! It kills work, and I must work, I can't waste time—I won't! I will sooner give you up." He put his hands upon her shoulders. "I love you! I want you! Look in my eyes and see if you dare hold back!"

Christian stood with the grip of his strong hands upon her shoulders, without a movement or a sign. Her face was very white. And suddenly he began to kiss that pale, still face, to kiss its eyes and lips, to kiss it from its chin up to its hair; and it stayed pale, as a white flower, beneath those kisses—as a white flower, whose stalk the fingers bend a little back.

There was a sound of knocking on the wall; Mr. Treffry called feebly. Christian broke away from Harz.

"To-morrow!" he whispered, and picking up his hat and cloak, went out into the rain.

CHAPTER XXIII

CHRISTIAN'S DECISION

IT was not till morning that Christian fell into a troubled sleep. She dreamed that a voice was calling her, and she was filled with the dream terror that is so dumb and helpless.

When she woke the light was streaming in; it was Sunday, and cathedral bells were chiming. Her first thought was of Harz. One step, one moment of courage! Why had she not told her uncle? If he had only asked! But why—why should she tell him? When it was over and she was gone, he would see that all was for the best.

Her eyes fell on Greta's empty bed. She sprang up, and bending over, kissed the pillow. "She will mind at first; but she 's so young! Nobody will really miss me, except Uncle Nic!" She stood a long while

in the window without moving. When she was dressed she called out to her maid:

"Bring me some milk, Barbi; I 'm going to church."

"*Ach ! gnädiges Fräulein*, will you no breakfast have ?"

"No thank you, Barbi."

"*Liebes Fräulein*, what a beautiful morning after the rain it has become! How cool ! It is for you good—for the colour in your cheeks; now they will again bloom!" and Barbi stroked her own well-coloured cheeks.

Dominique, sunning himself outside with a cloth across his arm, bowed as she passed, and smiled affectionately:

"He is better this morning, M'mselle. We march—we are getting on. Good news will put the heart in you."

Christian thought: "How sweet every one is to-day!"

Even the Villa seemed to greet her, with the sun aslant upon it; and the trees, trembling and weeping golden tears. At the cathedral she was early for the service, but here and there were figures bending reverently; the

faint and sickly odour of long-burnt incense clung in the air, a priest moved silently at the far end. She knelt, and when at last she rose the service had begun. The sound of the intoning was travelling through the aisles. A sense of peace had come—the peace of resolution. For good or bad she felt that she had faced her fate, and would be strong.

She went out with a look of quiet serenity and walked home along the dyke. Close to Harz's studio she sat down. Now—it was her own; all that had belonged to him, that had ever had a part in him, was hers.

An old beggar man who had been watching her came gently from behind. "Gracious lady! This is the lucky day for you," he said, peering at her eyes. "I am very old—I have lost my luck."

Christian opened her purse, there was only one coin in it, a gold piece; the beggar's eyes sparkled.

She thought suddenly: "It 's no longer mine; I must begin to be careful now," but she felt ashamed when she looked at the old man.

"I am very sorry; yesterday I would have given you this, but—but now it 's already given."

He seemed so old and poor—what could she give him? There was a little silver brooch at her throat: "You will get something for that," she said; "it 's better than nothing. I am very sorry you are so old and poor."

The beggar crossed himself. "Gracious lady," he muttered, "may you never want!"

Christian hurried on, and the rustling of the leaves soon carried the words away. She did not feel inclined to go in yet, and crossing the bridge began to climb the hill. There was a gentle breeze, drifting the clouds across the sun, the lizards darted out over the walls, looked at her, and whisked away.

The sunshine, dappling through the tops of trees, flashed on a torrent. The earth smelt sweet, the vineyards round the white farms glistened; everything seemed to leap and dance with sap and life; it was a moment of the Spring in midsummer. Christian walked on, wondering at her happiness.

"Am I heartless?" she thought. "I am

going to be his wife—I am going into life; I shall have to fight now, there 'll be no looking back."

The path broke away and wound down to the level of the torrent; on the other side it rose again, and was lost among the trees. The woods were dank; she hastened home.

In her room she began to pack, sorting and tearing up old letters. "Only one thing matters," she thought; "singleness of heart; to see your way, and keep to it with all your might."

She looked up and saw Barbi standing before her with towels in her hands.

"Are you going a journey, *gnädiges Fräulein?*" she said, with a scared face.

Christian looked at her before she answered.

"I am going away to be married, Barbi," she said at last; "but don't speak of it to any one."

Barbi leant a little forward, with the towels clasped to the blue cotton bosom of her dress.

"No, no! I will not speak. But, dear Fräulein, that is a big matter; have you well thought?"

"Thought, Barbi? Have I not!"

"But, dear Fräulein, will you be rich?"

"No! I shall be as poor as you."

"*Ach!* dear God! that 's terrible. Katrina, my sister, she is married; she tells me all her life; she tells me it is very hard, and but for the money in her stocking it would be harder. Dear Fräulein, think again! And is he good ? Sometimes they are not good."

"He is good," said Christian, rising; "it is all settled!" and she kissed Barbi on the cheek.

'You are crying, *liebes Fräulein!* Think yet again, perhaps it is not quite all settled; it is not possible that a maiden should not a way out leave ?"

Christian smiled. "I don't do things that way, Barbi."

Barbi hung the towels on the horse, and crossed herself.

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. TREFFRY IS TOLD

IT was late that afternoon. A tortoise-shell butterfly had come in, and fluttered round the ceiling; Mr. Treffry's eyes were fixed on it; the insect seemed to fascinate him. A plaid shawl was thrown across his shoulders, he was fanning himself slowly with a crimson-coloured fan. Christian came softly in.

"Could n't stay in bed, Chris," he called out with an air of guilt. "I feel better up; the heat was something awful. The doctor came, and piped off in a huff. Just because o' this." He motioned with the fan towards a jug of claret-cup and a pipe upon the table by his elbow. "I was only looking at 'em."

Christian, sitting down beside him, took the fan.

"If I could only get out of this heat—" he said, and closed his eyes.

"I must tell him," she thought; "I can't slink away."

"Pour me out some of that stuff, Chris."

She reached for the jug. Yes! She must tell him! Her heart sank.

Mr. Treffry took a lengthy draught. "Broken my promise; it don't matter—won't hurt any one but me." He took up the pipe and pressed tobacco into it. "I 've been lying here with this pain going right through me, all this time, and not a single smoke! D' you tell me anything the parsons say can do me half the good this pipe does?" He leaned back, steeped in a luxury of satisfaction. Presently, pursuing to himself a train of thought, he said: "Things have changed a lot since my young days. When I was a youngster, a young fellow had to look out for peck and perch—he put the future in his pocket. He did, or did n't 'do,' according as he had stuff in him. Now he's not content with that, it seems—does a trade upon his own opinion of himself; thinks he is what he says he's going to be."

"You are unjust," said Christian in a smothered voice.

Mr. Treffry grunted. "Ah, well! I like to know where I am. If I lend money to a man, I like to know whether he 's going to pay it back; I don't care whether he does or does n't, but I like to know. The same with other things. I don't care what a man has —though, mind you, Chris, it 's not a bad rule that measures men by the balance at their banks; but when it comes to marriage, that 's a different thing. What's not enough for one is not enough for two. You can't talk black white, or bread into your mouth. I don't care to speak about myself, as you know, Chris, but I tell you this—when I came to London I wanted to marry—I had n't any money, and I had to want. When I had the money—but that's neither here nor there!" He frowned, fingering his pipe. "I did n't ask her, Chris; I did n't think it the square thing; it seems that 's out of fashion!"

Christian's cheeks were burning. Mr. Treffry cast a sidelong glance at her.

"I think a lot while I lie here, nothing

much else to do. What I ask myself is this: What do you know about what 's best for you? What do you know of life? Take it or leave it, life's not all you think; not too nice a business; give and get all the way, and a fair start is everything."

Christian thought: "I must make my own life; will he never see?"

Mr. Treffry went on slowly:

"I get better every day, but I can't last for ever. It 's not pleasant to lie here and know that when I 'm gone there 'll be no one to keep a hand on the check string!"

Christian murmured: "Don't talk like that, dear!"

He answered patiently:

"It 's no use blinking facts, Chris. I 've lived a long time in the world; I 've seen things pretty well as they are; and now there's not much left for me to think about but you."

Christian laid her fingers on his hand.

"But, uncle, if you loved him, as I do! Do you tell me to be afraid? It 's cowardly and mean to be afraid. You—you have forgotten!"

Mr. Treffry closed his eyes.

"Yes," he said; "I 'm old."

The fan had dropped into Christian's lap; it rested on her white frock like some giant crimson leaf; her eyes were fixed on it.

Mr. Treffry looked at her. "Have you heard from him?" he asked with sudden intuition.

"Last night, in that room, when you thought I was talking to Dominique——"

The pipe fell from his hand.

"What?" he stammered: "Back? Stuff! He's in Italy; *I* know that, I and the poor horses."

Christian, without looking up, said:

"No he 's back; he wants me—I must go to him."

There was a long silence.

"You must go to him?" he repeated stolidly.

She longed to fling herself down at his knees and weep her heart out; but he was so still himself, that to move seemed quite impossible; she remained standing, silent, with folded hands.

Mr. Treffry spoke:

"You 'll let me know—before—you—go. Good-night!"

Christian stole away; she stood still in the passage. A long bead curtain rustled in the draught, and through it voices reached her.

"My honour is involved, or I would give the case up."

"He is very trying, poor Nicholas! He always had a peculiar quality of opposition; it has brought him to grief a hundred times. There is opposition in our blood; my family all have it. My eldest brother died of it; with my poor sister, who was gentle as a lamb, it took the form of doing the right thing in the wrong place. It is a matter of temperament, you see. You must have patience."

"Patience," repeated Dawney's voice, "is one thing; patience where there is responsibility is quite another. I 've not had a wink of sleep these last two nights."

There was a faint, shrill swish of silk.

"Is he so very ill?"

Christian held her breath. The answer came at last.

"Has he made his will? With this trouble in the side again, I tell you plainly, Mrs. Decie, there 's little or no chance."

Christian put her hands up to her ears, and ran out into the air. What was she about to do, then—to leave him dying!

CHAPTER XXV

THE STRUGGLE

ON the following day Harz, summoned by a message, crossed the Villa threshold. Mr. Treffry's bedroom was in disorder; and faintly perfumed with some scent. He had just risen, and was garbed in a dressing-suit, old and worn, which had a certain air of past magnificence. His seamed cheeks were newly shaved, drops of water still clung to his moustache and beard.

"I hope I see you well," he said, breathing with difficulty. Harz thought of the last time he had seen him, grey and dust-stained, underneath the phaeton hood. He felt sorry and ashamed, as a man feels before a comrade whose will he thwarts. Suddenly Christian came into the room, stood a moment looking at him, then sat down, resting her chin upon her hands.

"Chris!" said Mr. Treffry reproachfully. She shook her head, but did not look away; mournful and intent, her eyes seemed full of secret knowledge.

Mr. Treffry spoke:

"I 've no right to blame you, Mr. Harz, and Chris tells me you came to see me first, which is what I would have expected of you; but you should n't have come back, you know."

"I came back, sir, because I was obliged. I must speak out."

."I ask nothing better," Mr. Treffry replied.

Harz looked again at Christian; she made no sign, sitting always with her chin upon her hands.

"I have come for her," he said.

Mr. Treffry lifted his bloodshot eyes; his jaw was thrust forward, his lower lip fast set on his moustache.

"I can make my living," went on Harz. "I can make enough for both of us. But I can't wait."

"Why?"

Harz made no answer.

Mr. Treffry gripped his chair. "Yes, sir! I ask why? Is n't she worth waiting for? Is n't she worth serving for?"

"I can't expect you to understand me," the painter said. "My Art is my life to me. Do you suppose that if it was n't I should ever have left my village; or gone through all that I 've gone through, to get as far even as I am? You tell me to wait. If my hands and my will are n't free, how can I work? I can't do what I must to be worth my salt at all. You tell me to go away, to go back to England—knowing she is here, amongst you who hate me, a thousand miles away from me. I shall know that there 's a death fight going on in her and outside her against me—and you think that I can work! You think I shan't be blind to see and feeble to do! Others may be able, I am not. That is plain truth. If I loved her less——"

There was a silence, then Mr. Treffry said:

"It is n't square to come here and ask what you are asking. You don't know what 's in the future for you, you don't know

that you can keep your wife. It is n't pleasant, either, to think you can't hold up your head in your own country."

Harz turned white.

"Seven years ago," he broke out, "I was a boy and starving; if you had been in my place you would have done what I did. My country is as much to me as your country is to you. I 've been an exile seven years, perhaps I shall always be—I 've had punishment enough; but if you think I am a rascal, I 'll go and give myself up." He turned on his heel.

"Stop! I beg your pardon! I never meant to hurt you. It is n't easy for me to eat my words," Mr. Treffry said wistfully, "let that count for something." He held out his hand.

Harz came quickly back and took it. Christian's gaze was never for a moment withdrawn from him; the light darting through the half-closed shutters gave to her eyes a strangely bright intensity, it shone too in the folds of her white dress like the sheen of birds' wings. She seemed as though trying to store up within herself a memory.

Mr. Treffry glanced uneasily about him. "God knows I don't want anything but her happiness," he said. "What is it to me if you 'd murdered your mother? What is it to *me?* It 's *her* I 'm thinking of."

"How can you tell what is happiness to her? You have your own ideas of happiness. They are not hers, or mine. You can't dare to stop us!"

"Dare?" said Mr. Treffry, and with his glowing eyes and his tufted chin thrust out, he looked like an old lion in his bulk and grimness. "When you 're old like me, sir, and sick like me, you 'll know how hard a notion dies. I dare because I believe; a dog doesn't change his skin. Her father gave her over to me when she was a mite of a little thing; I 've known her all her life. I 've—I 've loved her—and you come here with your 'dare'!" His hand dragged at his beard, and shook as though it had a palsy.

Christian sprang to her feet, a look of terror on her face.

"All right, Chris! I don't ask for quarter, and I don't give it!"

Harz made a gesture of despair.

"I 've done the fair thing by you, sir," Mr. Treffry went on, "I ask you to do the fair thing by me. I ask you to wait, and come like an honest man, when you can say, 'I see my way—here 's this and that for her.' What makes this art you talk of different from any other call in life? It doesn't alter facts, or give you what other men have no right to expect. It doesn't put grit into you, or keep your hands clean, or prove that two and two make five."

Harz answered with a bitter smile;

"You know as much of Art as I know of money. If we live a thousand years we shall never understand each other. I am doing what is right in my eyes, not in yours. I refuse because I must."

Mr. Treffry took hold of the painter's sleeve, and as he spoke he tugged at it with trembling fingers.

"I make you an offer. Your word not to see or write to her for a year! Then, position or not, money or no money, if she 'll have you, I 'll make it right for you."

"I could not take your money."

Mr. Treffry's cheeks blanched. "What? I do what I like with my money. Who 'll stop me?"

"I."

"You!"

Harz bowed his head.

Mr. Treffry made a motion with his hands as though to put the thought aside. A kind of despair seemed suddenly to have seized on him. With an effort he rose from his chair, and stood towering over them.

"All my life," he said, and something seemed to click deep down in his throat, "I 've tried to face the music; but this—" He sank back in his seat.

"Go!" whispered Christian, "go!" But Mr. Treffry's voice sounded again: "It 's nothing—nothing! As man to man—" he stopped, and touching Christian's hand: "It 's for the child to say. Well, Chris!"

"I gave my word. If he tells me to come, I must."

Mr. Treffry did not stir, he might have been graven in stone; he kept his fingers on

her hand. The room was wonderfully still.

The painter looked into the old man's face, all seamed and hollow, with beads of perspiration on the forehead, and broke the silence with a laugh.

"What am I waiting for? You know I can't tell you to come with—*that*, there"; he pointed at Treffry. "Why did you send for me? Was it to make a fool of me?"

He turned, and left the room. Christian sank on her knees, burying her face in her two hands. Mr. Treffry pressed his handkerchief with a stealthy movement to his mouth. It was dyed crimson with the price of victory.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TWO PHILOSOPHERS

A TELEGRAM had summoned Herr Paul from Vienna. He had started forthwith, leaving unpaid accounts to a more joyful opportunity, amongst them a chemist's bill, for a wonderful quack medicine of which he brought six bottles.

He came from Mr. Treffry's room with two tears rolling down his cheeks, and all the morning he was saying:

"Poor Nicholas! Poor Nicholas! *Il n'a pas de chance—il n'a pas de chance!*"

It was difficult to find any one to listen; there was much to do in the sick chamber, and the women waited, scared and silent, for orders that now and then were whispered through the door. Herr Paul could not bear this silence, and to his own servant he talked for half an hour; till Fritz, too, van-

ished to fetch something wanted from the town. Then in despair Herr Paul stood in his room with a bottle of medicine in his hand, and his stiff hair rumpled.

"Ah!" he thought, "it is hard not to be allowed to help—it is hard to wait! When the heart is suffering, it is frightful—frightful!" . . . He turned round in the room, looking furtively about him; then lighted a cigar. "Yes," he thought, breathing out a chain of smoke, "it comes to all of us—at some time it comes to all of us; and what is it, this death we talk of? Is it it any worse than this life? This frightful jumble that we make for ourselves? Prrt! Poor Nicholas! After all it is he that has the luck!"

His eyes filled with tears, and drawing a penknife from his pocket, he began to stab the stuffing of his chair. Scruff, who sat watching the chink of light beneath the door, turned his head, blinked at him, and began tapping feebly with a claw.

"It is intolerable, this uncertainty—to be near, and yet so far, is not endurable."

He stepped across the room. The dog, following, threw his black-marked muzzle upwards with a gruff noise, and went back to the door. Herr Paul was holding in his hand a bottle of champagne. Narrowing his eyes, he drew the cork.

"Poor Nicholas!" he thought; "he chose it!" and he drained a glass. "Poor Nicholas! The prince of fellows, and of what use is one? My God! They keep me away from him!" His eyes fell on the terrier. "*Ach*, my dear," he said, "you and I, we alone are kept away!"

He drained a second glass.

"And what is it?" he thought, "this life of ours? Froth—like this!" He tossed off a third glass. "Forget! If one cannot help it, it is better to forget." He put his hat upon his head. "Yes. There is no room for me here, *allons!* I am not wanted!" And finishing the bottle, he went out into the passage. Scruff ran and lay down at Mr. Treffry's door. Herr Paul looked at him. "*Ach!*" he said, tapping his chest, "ungrateful hound!" And opening the front door he went out on tiptoe.

Late that afternoon Greta stole hatless through the lilac bushes; she looked tired after her night journey, and sat idly on a chair in the speckled shadow of a lime tree.

"It is not like home," she thought; "I am unhappy. Even the birds are silent, but perhaps that is because it is so hot. I have never been sad like this—for it is not fancy that I am sad this time, as it is sometimes. It is in my heart like the sound the wind makes through a wood, it feels quite empty in my heart. If it is always like this to be unhappy, then I am sorry for all the unhappy things in the world; I am sorrier than I ever was before."

A shadow falling on the grass, she raised her eyes, and saw Dawney. He was standing with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his coat.

"Dr. Edmund!" she whispered.

He turned to her and smiled; a heavy furrow showed between his brows. His eyes, always rather close together, stared painfully.

"Dr. Edmund," Greta whispered, "is it true?"

He took her hand, and spreading his own palm over it, smoothed it.

"Perhaps," he said; "perhaps not. We must hope."

Greta left her hand in his, and looked up, awed.

"They say he is dying."

"We have sent for the best man in Vienna."

Greta shook her head.

"But you are clever, Dr. Edmund; and *you* are afraid."

"He is brave," said Dawney; "we must all be brave, you know. You too!"

"Brave?" repeated Greta; "what is it to be brave? If it is not to cry and make a fuss—that I can do. But if it is not to be sad in here," she touched her breast, "that I cannot do, and it shall not be any good for me to try."

"To be brave is to hope; don't give up hope, dear."

"No," said Greta, tracing the pattern of the sunlight on her skirt. "But I think that when we hope, we are not brave, because we are expecting something for ourselves. Chris says

that hope is prayer, and if it is prayer, then all the time we are hoping, we are asking for something, and it is not brave to ask for things."

A smile curved Dawney's mouth.

"Go on, Philosopher!" he said. "Be brave in your own way, it will be just as good as anybody else's."

"What are you going to do to be brave, Dr. Edmund?"

"I? Oh, well! If we only had five years off his life!" He sighed: "Good-bye, Philosopher, and Friend."

Greta watched him walking noiselessly back towards the house.

"I shall never be brave," she mourned; "I shall always be wanting to be happy." And, kneeling down, she began to disentangle from a spider's web a prisoned fly, who was giving pitiful small jerks to the silky, bluish threads. A plant of hemlock had sprung up in the long grass by her feet. Greta thought, dismayed:

"Why, they have let the weeds grow!"

It seemed another sign of the death of joy, that was so plain to her.

"But it 's very beautiful," she thought again; "the blossoms are like stars. I am not going to pull it up. I will leave it; perhaps it will spread all through the garden; and if it does I do not care, for now things are not like they used to be and I do not think they shall ever be again."

CHAPTER XXVII

TIDES OF HEAT

THE days went by; those long, hot days, when a haze of heat swims up into the air about ten of the forenoon, and, as the sun sinks level with the mountains, melts into golden ether which sets the world a-quiver, and rains on it a thousand sparkles.

With the lighting of the stars those sparkles die, vanishing one by one from off the hillsides; evening comes flying down the valleys, and life rests under her cool wings. Then with a sort of sob night falls; and a hundred little voices of the night arise.

It was drawing near grape-gathering, and in the heat the fight for Nicholas Treffry's life went on, day in, day out, with gleams of hope and moments of despair. Doctors came, but after the first he refused to see them.

"No," he said to Dawney—"throwing away my money. If I pull through it won't be because of them."

And for days together he would allow no one but Dawney, Dominique, and the paid nurse in the room.

"I can stand it better," he said to Christian, "when I don't see any of you; keep away, old girl, let me get on with it!"

If she could have done anything to help it would have eased the tension of her nerves, the aching at her heart. At his own request they had moved his bed into a corner so that he might face the wall. There he would lie for hours together, not speaking a word, except now and then to ask for drink.

Sometimes Christian crept in unnoticed, and sat watching, with her lips compressed, her arms folded tightly on her breast. At night, after Greta was asleep, she would turn her burning face from side to side, and her lips would form half-uttered, feverish prayers. She spent hours at her little table in the schoolroom, writing letters to Harz that were never sent. Once she wrote these words:

"I am the most wicked of all creatures—I have even wished that he may die!" A few minutes afterwards Miss Naylor found her with her head buried on her arms, and the table strewn with little scraps of paper. Christian looked up; the tears were streaming down her cheeks. "Don't touch me!" she cried, and springing up, she rushed away. An hour later she stole into her uncle's room, and sank down on the floor beside the bed. She sat there silently, unnoticed all the evening. When night came she could hardly be persuaded to leave the room, and pressed her lips to his damp forehead, whispering: "I love you."

One day Mr. Treffry expressed a wish to see Herr Paul; it was a long while before the latter could summon courage to go in.

"There 's a few dozen of the Gordon sherry at my Chambers, in London, Paul," Mr. Treffry said; "I 'd be glad to think you had 'em. And my man, Dominique, my Will makes him all right, but keep your eye on him; he 's a good sort for a foreigner, and no chicken, but sooner or later, the women 'll

get hold of him, I suppose, and he 'll have trouble, like the rest of us. That 's all I had to say. Send Chris to me."

Herr Paul stood by the bedside speechless. Suddenly he blurted out:

"Ah! my dear! Courage, courage! We are all mortal. You will get well!" and, putting his hands up to his eyes, Herr Paul fled from the room. All the morning after that he walked about quite inconsolable: "If I had only stayed," he kept remarking, "and talked to him, told him the news; he would have cheered up. My God! We could have pulled him through! But it was frightful to see him, you know, frightful! An iron man could not have borne it."

When Christian came to him, Mr. Treffry raised himself and looked at her a long while.

"I 'm not going to die, Chris," he said, "until I 've seen you through your trouble."

His wistful face was like an accusation.

That very afternoon the news came from the sickroom that he was better, having had no pain for several hours.

Every one went about with smiles lurking

in their eyes, and ready to break forth at a word. In the kitchen Barbi burst out crying, and, forgetting to turn and toss the pan, spoiled the *Kaiser-Schmarn* that she was making. Dominique, unable to contain himself, was observed draining a flask of Chianti, rolling his eyes above it; when he had finished, he solemnly cast forth the very little that was left, as it were, a libation to the sunlight. An order was given for tea to be taken to the arbour under the acacias, where it was always cool; and it was felt that something in the nature of high festival was being held. Even Herr Paul was present; but Christian did not come—that arbour was too full of memories. Nobody spoke of illness, in the superstition that to mention it might break the spell of respite.

Miss Naylor, who had gone into the house to fetch a book, presently came back, and said with a nervous little twitching of her face:

"There is a strange man standing over there by the corner of the house."

"Really!" said Mrs. Decie; "what does he want?"

"I did not ask him," Miss Naylor answered reddening. "I—don't—know—whether he is quite respectable. His coat is buttoned very close, and he—does n't seem—to have a—collar."

"Go and see what he wants, dear child," Mrs. Decie said to Greta.

"I don't know—I really do not know—" began Miss Naylor; "he has very—high—boots," but Greta was already on her way, her hands clasped behind her, her demure eyes taking in the stranger's figure.

"Please?" she said, when she was close to him.

The stranger took his cap off with a jerk, shifting uneasily from leg to leg.

"This house has no bells," he said in a nasal voice; "it has a tendency to discourage one."

"Yes," said Greta gravely, "there is a bell, but it does not ring now, because my uncle is so ill."

"I am very sorry to hear that. I don't know the people here, but I am very sorry to hear that. I would be glad to speak a few

words to your sister, if it is your sister that I want."

Greta gazed at him and the stranger's face grew furiously red.

"Is it," she said with intuition, "that you are a friend of Herr Harz? If you are a friend of *his*, you will please come and have some tea, and while you are having tea I will look for Chris."

Perspiration bedewed the stranger's forehead.

"Tea?" he stammered in despair. "Excuse me! I don't drink tea."

"There is also coffee," Greta said.

The stranger's progress towards the arbour was so slow that Greta arrived considerably before him.

"It is a friend of Herr Harz," she whispered; "he will drink coffee. I am going to find Chris."

"Greta!" gasped Miss Naylor.

Mrs. Decie put up her hand.

"Ah!" she said, and her smile was as the very crown of knowledge; "if it is so we must be very nice to him for Christian's sake."

Miss Naylor's face grew soft.

"Ah, yes!" she said; "for Christian's sake —of course," and she ladled spoonfuls of the frothy cream into the coffee which Mrs. Decie had poured out.

Herr Paul, who was sitting with his hands upon his knees, shrugged his shoulders.

"Prrt!" he muttered with a queer grimace, "that recommences."

"Paul!" murmured Mrs. Decie, "you lack the elements of wisdom."

Herr Paul glared at the approaching stranger.

Mrs. Decie rose and smilingly held out her hand.

"We are so glad to know you; you are an artist too, perhaps? I take a great interest in art, and especially in that school which Mr. Harz represents. Ye-es——"

Her pale eyes transfixed his face, the cut of his coat and his high boots; her pale lips smiled encouragement:

"Mr. Harz is an artist of unusual ability; a little rash perhaps, but that is a matter of his temperament."

The stranger smiled.

"He is the genuine article, ma'am," he said. "Excuse me, he represents no school, he is one of that kind whose corpses make schools."

Some flicker, as of light, passed over Mrs. Decie's face.

"An original!" it seemed to say.

"Ah!" she murmured; "you are an American. Do sit down! My niece will soon be here."

Greta came running back.

"Will you come, please?" she said, standing still, and gazing at the stranger. "Chris is ready."

Gulping down his coffee, he included all the company in a single bow, and followed her.

"*Ach!*" said Herr Paul, fixing his eyes scathingly on no one in particular, "*garçon très chic, ça!*"

Christian was standing by her little table. She waited for the stranger to begin.

"I am sending Mr. Harz's things to England," he said; "there are some pictures here. He would be glad to have them."

A flood of crimson swept over Christian's face.

"I am sending them to London," said the stranger; "perhaps you could give them me to-day."

"They are ready; my sister will show you."

Her eyes seemed suddenly to dart into his soul, and try to drag something from it. Suddenly the words rushed from her lips:

"Is there any message for me?"

The stranger's eyes rested on her curiously.

"No," he stammered, "no! I guess not. He is well. . . . I wish—" He stopped; her white face seemed to flash scorn, despair, and entreaty on him in a single breath. Suddenly she held out her hands.

"You were very good to come!" And turning, she left him standing there.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SANDS RUN OUT

WHEN Christian went that evening to her uncle's room he was sitting up in bed, and began at once to talk with restless, feeble energy. "Chris," he said, "I can't stand this dying here by inches. I 'm going to try what a journey 'll do for me. I want to get back to the old country. The doctor 's promised. There 's a shot in the locker yet! I believe in that young chap; he 's stuck to me like a man. There 's grit in him. I used to think he was one of those clever, nonchalanty beggars they wash out of your 'Varsities nowadays by hundreds, but he 'll make his mark. . . . It 'll be your birthday on Tuesday, old girl, and you 'll be twenty. Seventeen years since your father died. You 've been a lot to me, my dear. . . . A parson came here to-day. That 's a bad sign.

Thought it his duty to come! Very civil of him! I would n't see him, though. If there 's anything in what they tell you, I 'm not going to sneak in at this time o' day. You 've got to find out things for yourself down here; can't say *I 've* found out much—" he pressed his hand over his mouth as if to still the twitching of his cheeks—"but here I lie! There 's one thing that's rather badly on my mind. I took advantage of Mr. Harz with this damned pitifulness of mine. You 've a right to look at me as I 've seen you sometimes when you thought I was asleep. If I had n't been ill he 'd never have left you. I don't blame you, Chris—not I! You love me? I know that, old girl. But one 's alone when it comes to the run-in. Don't cry, my dear! Our minds are n't Sunday-school books; that 's the truth you 're finding out." He sighed and turned towards the wall.

The noise of sun-blinds being raised vibrated faintly through the house. A feeling of terror seized on the girl; he lay so still, and yet the drawing of each breath was

such a fight. If she could only suffer in his place! She went close, and bent over him.

"Uncle!" she whispered.

"It 's air we want, both you and I!" he muttered, and a minute later seemed asleep. Christian beckoned to the nurse, and stole out through the window.

To the beat of a single drum a regiment was passing in the road; she stood half-hidden in the lilac bushes watching them. It was dusk; the poplar leaves drooped lifeless and almost black above her head, the dust raised by the soldiers' feet hung in the air; it seemed as if in all the world no freshness and no life were stirring. The tramp of feet had died away. Suddenly within arm 's length of her a man appeared, his stick shouldered like a sword. He raised his hat.

"Good-evening! You do not remember me? Sarelli. Pardon! You looked like a ghost standing there. How badly those fellows marched! We hang, you see, upon the skirts of our profession, and we criticise; it is all that we are fit for, *hein?*" His black eyes, restless and malevolent like a swan's, seemed

to stab her face. "A fine evening! Too hot. The storm is wanted; you feel that? It is weary waiting for the storm; but afterwards, my dear young lady, afterwards, there is peace—who knows?" He smiled, gently, this time, and baring his head again, was lost to view in the shadow of the trees.

The figure appeared to Christian like the sudden vision of some threatening, yet hidden force. She thrust out her hands, as though to keep it off.

"No use," she thought, "it 's within, nothing can keep it from me." She went to Mrs. Decie 's room, where her aunt and Miss Naylor were conversing in low tones. To see them and hear their voices brought back the touch of this world of everyday which had no part or lot in the terrifying powers within her.

Dawney slept at the Villa now. In the dead of night he was awakened by a light flashed in his eyes. Christian was standing there. Her face was pale and wild with terror, her hair fell in dark masses on her shoulders.

He sat up in bed and stared, the candle flame imparting a greenish yellow hue to his round visage.

"Save him! Save him!" she cried. "Quick! The bleeding—he called to me!"

He saw her muffle her face in her white loose sleeves, and seizing the candle, he leaped out of bed and rushed away.

The internal hæmorrhage had come again, and Nicholas Treffry wavered between life and death. When it had ceased, he sank into a sort of stupor. About six o'clock he came back to consciousness; watching his eyes closely, they could see a mental struggle taking place within him. At last he singled Christian out from the others by a sign.

"I 'm beat, Chris," he whispered. "Let *him* know, I want to see him."

His voice grew a little stronger. "I thought that I could see it through—but here 's the end." He lifted his hand ever so little, and let it fall again. When told a little later that a telegram had been sent to Harz his eyes expressed his satisfaction.

Herr Paul came down, perfumed, in ig-

norance of the night's events. He stopped in front of the barometer and tapped it, remarking to Miss Naylor: "The glass has gone down-stairs; we shall have cool weather—it will still go well with him!"

But with her brown and kindly face twisted by pity and concern, she told him that it was a question of hours now. Herr Paul turned first purple and then pale; sitting down, he trembled violently. "I cannot believe it," he exclaimed almost angrily. "Yesterday he was so well! Ah! these doctors! I cannot believe it! Poor Nicholas! Yesterday he spoke to me!" Taking Miss Naylor's hand, he clutched it in his own. "Ah!" he cried, letting it go suddenly, and striking at his forehead, "it is too terrible; only yesterday he spoke to me of sherry. Is there nobody, then, who can do good?"

"There is only God," replied Miss Naylor softly.

"God?" said Herr Paul in a scared voice.

"We—can—all—pray to Him," Miss Naylor murmured solemnly, and little spots of colour came into her cheeks; suddenly they

spread, and her eyes brightened. "I am going to do it—now."

Herr Paul raised her hand and kissed it.

"Are you?" he said; "good! good! Me too." He squared his shoulders; passing through his study door, he closed it carefully behind him, then for some unknown reason set his back against it. "Ugh!" he shuddered: "Death! It comes to all of us. Some day it comes to me; it might come to-morrow! Poor Nicholas, one must pray for him. I am a wretched sinner; one must pray."

The day dragged to its end. In the sky clouds had mustered, and, crowding close on one another, clung round the sun, soft, thick, grey-white, like the feathers on a pigeon's breast. Towards evening faint tremblings were felt at intervals, as from the shock of immensely distant earthquakes.

Nobody went to bed that night, but in the morning the report was just the same: "Unconscious—a question of hours." Once only did he recover consciousness, and then he asked for Harz. He was told that he was on the way. A telegram had come. Towards

seven of the evening the long-expected storm broke in a sky like ink. Into the valleys and over the crests of mountains it seemed as though an unseen hand were spilling from the heavens goblets of pale wine, darting a sword-blade zigzag over trees, roofs, spires, peaks, into the very firmament, which answered every thrust with great bursts of groaning. Just beyond the veranda Greta saw a glowworm shining, as it might be a tiny bead of fallen lightning. Soon the rain covered everything. Sometimes a jet of light, more rarely vivid, flung across the hilltops, brought them towering, dark, and hard, over the house, to disappear again behind the raindrops and the shaken leaves. Each breath drawn by the storm was like the clash of many cymbals; and in his room Mr. Treffry lay unconscious of its fury.

Greta had crept in unobserved, and sat curled in a corner, with Scruff in her arms, rocking slightly to and fro. When Christian passed, she caught her skirt, and whispered: "It is your birthday, Chris!"

In a low chair by the bed sat Dawney leaning his head upon his hand.

Christian came to his side, and whispered: "Is he going to die like that?"

"He will come to himself I think, before the end," he answered; "maybe any minute now. If you have something to say you must be ready; it will be sudden."

She sat down. Sometimes a pale streak of lightning cast an unearthly look upon his features, and her heart stopped beating.

Mr. Treffry stirred at last.

"What 's that? Thunder?—it 's cooler. Where am I? Chris!"

Dawney signed for her to take his place; passing Greta, he looked down at her asleep with the terrier in her arms, and thought: "How did she come there? Poor child! Well, let her be, sleep 's the best thing for all of them."

"Chris!" Mr. Treffry said. "It 's near now." She bent across him, and her tears fell on his forehead. He raised his finger, and touched her cheek.

"Forgive!" she whispered; "love me!"

For an hour or more he did not speak, though once or twice he moaned a little, and faintly tightened his pressure on her fingers. The storm had sunk behind the blackness of the night, lightning no longer blanched the candle glow. Very far away the thunder muttered.

Christian looked up; his eyes were open once again. They rested on her, and then passed beyond, into that abyss dividing youth from age, conviction from conviction, life from death.

At the foot of the bed Dawney stood covering his face; behind him Dominique knelt with hands held upwards; the sound of Greta's breathing rose and fell, softly, in the stillness.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SPRING RETURNS

IT was an afternoon in March more than three years after Mr. Treffry's death. Christian was sitting at the window of a studio in St. John's Wood. The sky was covered with soft, high clouds, through which shone little gleams of blue. Now and then a bright shower fell, sprinkling the trees, where every twig was curling upwards as if awaiting the gift of its new leaves. And it seemed to her that the boughs thickened and budded under her very eyes; a great concourse of sparrows had gathered on those boughs, and kept raising a shrill chatter. On the far side of the room Harz was working at a picture.

She looked at him. On her face there was the quiet smile of one who knows that she has but to turn her eyes to see that which she

wishes to; of one whose dear possessions are safe beneath her hand. And she looked at him with that quiet possessive smile. But as into the brain of one turning in his bed there will suddenly leap up out of warm nothingness the fancies of grim dreams, so Christian's thoughts turned suddenly to that long ago grey dawn, when Harz found her kneeling by her uncle's body. The smile died off her lips and she seemed to see again his dead face, so gravely quiet, and furrowless, that pain might never have been near it. She seemed to see again, in that twilight hour of struggle, her lover and herself setting forth in silence along the river wall to where they had first met; and sitting down still silent beneath the poplar-tree where the little bodies of the chafers had lain strewn in Spring. She seemed to see the trees changing from black to grey, from grey to green, and in the dusky sky the long white lines of cloud flighting to the south like birds; and, very far, the rosy crystal peaks watching poor earth awaken from the night. Once more she felt her spirit shrinking, with

its closed bruised wings, away from his, and that long desperate hour of disillusioned self-discovery when he in his raw strength seemed hateful to her, and she hateful to herself—as though her body had been dragged through some foul pond. And remembering the words that she had spoken: "I have no heart! You tore my heart in two between you. Love is all self—I wanted him to die," the painful colour, even now, rushed up into her cheeks. And she remembered too the raindrops on the vines like a million tiny lamps, and the throstle that began to sing. And then, as dreams die out into warm nothingness, the recollection vanished, and on her lips the quiet smile came back.

She took a letter from her pocket.

". . . Oh, Chris! We are really coming; I seem to be always telling it to myself, and I have told Scruff many times, but he does not care, because he is getting old. Miss Naylor says we shall arrive for breakfast, and that we shall be hungry but perhaps she will not be very hungry, if it is rough. Papa said to

me: '*Je serai inconsolable, mais inconsolable!*' But I think he will not be, because he is going to Vienna. When we are come, there will be nobody at Villa Rubein; Aunt Constance has gone a fortnight ago to Florence. There is a young man at her hotel; she says he will be one of the greatest playwriters in England, and she sent me a play of his to read; it was only a little about love, I did not like it very much. . . . Oh, Chris! I think I shall cry when I see you. As I am quite grown up now, Miss Naylor is not to come back with me; sometimes she is sad, but she will be glad to see you, Chris. She seems always sadder when it is Spring. To-day I walked along the wall; the little green balls of wool are growing on the poplars there already, and I saw one chafer; it will not be long before the cherry blossom comes; and I felt so funny, sad and happy together, and once I thought that I had wings and could fly away up the valley to Meran—but I had none, so I sat upon the bench where we sat the day we took the pictures, and I thought and thought; there was nothing came to me in my

thoughts, but all was sweet and a little noisy, and rather sad; it was like the buzzing of the chafer in my head; and now I feel so tired and all my blood is running up and down. I do not mind, because I know it is the Spring.

"Dominique came to see us the other day; he is very well, and is half the proprietor of the Adler Hotel at Meran; he is not at all different, and he asked about you and about Alois—do you know, Chris, to myself I call him Herr Harz, but when I have seen him this time I shall call him Alois in my heart also.

"I have a letter from Dr. Edmund; he is in London, so perhaps you have seen him, only he has a great many patients and some that he has 'hopes of killing soon'! especially one old lady, because she is always wanting him to do things for her, and he is never saying 'no,' so he does not like her. He says that he is getting old. When I have finished this letter I am going to write and tell him that perhaps he shall see me soon, and then I think he will be very sad. Now that the Spring is come there are more flowers to take

to Uncle Nic's grave, and every day, when I am gone, Barbi is to take them so that he shall not miss you, Chris, because all the flowers I put there are for you.

"I am buying some toys without paint on for my niece.

"Oh, Chris! this will be the first baby that I have known.

"I am only to stay three weeks with you, but I think when I am once there I shall be staying longer. I send a kiss for my niece, and to Herr Harz, my love—that is the last time I shall call him Herr Harz; and to you, Chris, all the joy that is in my heart.

"Your loving

GRETA."

Christian rose, and, turning very softly, stood, leaning her elbows on the back of a high seat, looking at her husband. Long she stood there—watching his quick movements.

In her eyes there was a slow, clear, faintly smiling, and yet yearning look, as though this strenuous figure bent upon its task were seen

for just a moment as a tiny part of life, and not as all the world to her; as though her eyes said, "You can spare me but a little—are you sure it is enough? Yes. *You* are sure—but is it? Ah! I wonder! And these great tasks of yours that fill your thoughts, are they so very great? Yes, they are very great, for you are you—and I am part of you, and yet——"

The almost mocking look died out, a sort of shining took its place, and a little smile. "I love to see you busy and absorbed—do what you like, don't trouble about me; I love to look at you anyhow, and any when, and anywhere. I am a woman that has given you her life, I would not have it otherwise."

Then once again there crept back to her eyes that slow, soft look of "seeing"; that look before whose clearness and whose smile all his keen, shrewd glances, all his energy and strength, were but as the motions of a baby's hands. She took her elbows off the back of the high seat, and heaved a little sigh.

Harz gave her a quick look, and put his lips down to her hand.

"Tired?" he asked.

"No, it's only—what Greta says about the Spring; it makes one want more than one has got."

Slipping her hand away, she went back to the window. Harz stood looking after her; then, taking up his palette, began again to paint.

In the world outside the high soft clouds flew by; the trees seemed thickening and budding.

And Christian thought:

"Then can we never have quite—quite enough?"

THE END

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